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COMPLETE

WAR NOVELS

JANUARY

COMPLETE JANUARY

WAR

15¢ **NOVELS** *Magazine*



**WHEN A YANK GETS
FIGHTING MAD**

SMASH NOVEL OF THE ALLIES IN RUSSIA

By LIEUT. JAY D. BLAUFOX



**IF BOMBERS DON'T DO IT
BAYONETS WILL!**

Great Novel of Fighting Yanks with MacArthur

By DAVID BRANDT



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We Ferreted Out
The SECRETS of ANCIENT
FORBIDDEN MYSTERIES
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FOR THE
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BROADCASTING STATIONS (top illustration) employ Radio Technicians as operators, installers, maintenance men and in other fascinating, steady, well-paying technical jobs. **FIXING RADIO SETS** (bottom illustration), a booming field today, pays many Radio Technicians \$30, \$40, \$50 a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make \$5 to \$10 a week extra, fixing Radios in spare time.

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Now!**



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WAR

NOVELS Magazine

VOL. 1, NO. 3

JANUARY, 1943

**3 BIG, SMASHING, FAST-ACTION WAR NOVELS
OF FIGHTING YANKS ON ALL FRONTS!**

Page

WHEN A YANK GETS FIGHTING MAD by Lieut. Jay D. Blaufox 10

Bring on those murdering Nazi fiends that slaughtered and wiped-out whoever and whatever fell under their merciless, goosestepping, hob-nailed boots, bring on their Luftwaffe and their panzer divisions and their blitzkriegs!—A fighting Yank in a Russian uniform and his fearless Allies were ready for them, with the world's deadliest, fastest, toughest tanks and planes and guns!

IF BOMBERS DON'T DO IT, BAYONETS WILL! by David Brandt 44

A hand-picked patrol of death—that was this hardbitten U. S. Ranger crew, thirty battle-toughened Yanks named by MacArthur behind thirty bloody bayonets, with a no-quarter fighting job to do in the teeth of machine-gun fire back-stabbing Jap devils were blasting at them from every fox-hole and trench and ambush!

TELL IT TO THE U. S. RANGERS! by Allan K. Echols 76

Here was the danger area, the invasion beachhead, the logical stretch for the Allies to open a second front, and the Yanks knew it and the Nazis knew it, and Lieutenant Clay Temple, Brooklyn, U. S. A., was set to fight this big push to the finish if single-handed he had to smash to bits that solid mass of Hun shore gun emplacements, barbed wire, minefields, pillboxes, and roving tanks!

ROBERT O. ERISMAN—EDITOR

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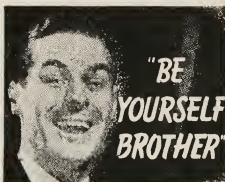
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The Bachelor Life:
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say about the Gay
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Sultry, glamorous
screen stars fall in
love at first sight with
amazing rapidity.

**The Playboy at
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can keep going until
you reach a hundred.

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of His Wife:** Without
benefit of Reno, surgery
or ailment (you'll
laugh at this heartily).

**The 99-44/100%
Puritans:** They partic-
ipated in "Bundling"
but still they were pure.

Just a Freudy-Gut:
Or Memoirs of a Freud-
ian Nightmare.

**The Art of Persua-
sion:** Is an answer to
a layman's prayer. It
hits a new high for
shoe radness, plumbs
the depths of delirium
and blandly bares hope-
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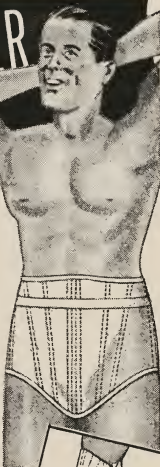
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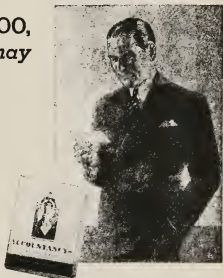
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WHEN A YANK GETS

FIGHTING MAD

by **LIEUT. JAY D. BLAUFOX**

Author of "Dive-Bomb Those Nazi Dogs to Hell!" etc.



He slashed out viciously at the Nazi, fighting furiously

I
DOCTOR Mikhail Tchekov, American military surgeon attached to the Russian Army and stationed in Armavir in the Caucasus, waited in front of the camp where the Soviets kept their German prisoners on the outside of the town.

As he stood before the gates of the barbedwire entanglements waiting to be admitted, he remembered to keep well back from the gate. One touch of the wire before the electric switches were pulled which charged them, and he—or anyone—would need a doctor. That is, if he survived the terrific electric shock.



at the side of his valiant Russian Allies!

Not bullets and bayonets but medicine and food awaited Nazi prisoners taken by the Allies, but for those Heile friends who chose to destroy and murder and maim whoever and whatever fell under their merciless, goosestepping, hob-nailed boots, this fighting Yank in a Russian uniform and his fearless United Nations bottlemates had a hell-spawned welcome ready—the world's deadliest, fastest, toughest tanks and guns and planes!

A guard strode to the gate. He hear we have a new batch of prisoners swung it wide and saluted.

"Thank you, Pavrovitch," said "Da," replied the guard Pavrovitch. Mickey nodding at the Russian. "I "General Timoshenko has added an-

BRING ON THOSE MURDERING NAZI FIENDS—THIS FIGHTING YANK AND

HIS FEARLESS ALLIES WERE READY FOR THEM!—SMASH NOVEL!

other five hundred to his collection of Nazi dogs for his great kennel."

Mickey laughed. He entered the enclosure.

The gang at the hospital called him Mickey. Mickey Checkoff and even the nurses dared call him that—though they did it quietly, respectfully and even affectionately for everyone in the hospital situated on the left bank of the Kuban River liked the tall, handsome, dark-eyed American. They liked his jokes; his broad smile; and the noise he made with his tongue—a sort of clucking noise—twice. When he said anything that tickled his hearer, a broad wink always accompanied it from one of his laughing eyes.

"Do I have to examine the whole five hundred, Pavrovitch?" he asked smilingly.

"Only fifty, doctor," replied Pavrovitch. "The others have been examined."

Mickey strode on to a low, rambling pinewood building, at one end of the camp.

He walked past dozens of small groups of half-starved, weary Nazis in ragged greengreen uniforms. He saw the toes of many of them sticking through rotten, wornout boots. Their coats and britches were torn, badly patched, or pinned together.

As he passed one man separated from the rest, the German stopped him.

"Herr doktor."

Mickey stopped.

"Oh! Hello Heinsel," he greeted in perfect German.

Heinsel was a small man; of the type which might have been obese if he had been well fed enough.

"Wie gehts?" asked Mickey.

"Sehr gut!" smiled Heinsel. The man never complained; at least, not to the American. It was odd seeing an American uniform among the German and Russians in camp.

MICKEY and Heinsel were old friends. They had known each other when Mickey was taking a post-graduate course in medicine at the Breslau University. Heinsel gave up surgery when he lost an arm in the attack on Moscow.

"I just wanted to let you know that one of your new prisoners is Von Starheim," Heinsel warned him. "You'll meet him in the examining hut."

Mickey's face was not a poker face. He showed his surprise plainly. Then he smiled.

"Really," he grinned. "We meet even here."

"Hitler may yearn to rule the world," Heinsel added. "But one thing is certain; if he wins, he won't be able to make it any larger—or any smaller."

"So my old swordswinging Von Starheim is a guest of ours," mused Mickey.

"I shall always remember how you used to beat him to a pulp with your fists in the good old American fashion while he would insist on using broadswords in your duels," recalled Heinsel as if it were something pleasant to remember.

"So will he, I'll bet," smiled Mickey. "He swore to kill me for it someday. Said I was responsible for disgracing him at the University; making a laughing stock of him for refusing to fight in the prescribed German fashion; making him resign from the College of Medicine, he said." Mickey looked away from Heinsel as he reminisced. He turned back to the smaller, bespectacled man. "Do you think he meant what he said," he grinned. "Do you really think he'll try to kill me?"

Heinsel was not smiling. His undernourished face was serious. "I'd be careful if I were you, Mickey," he urged. "I've seen Von Starheim in action. He is capable of anything."

Mickey smiled at the German.

"Thank you for the tip, Heinsel,"

he said reassuringly. "I'll be careful."

As Mickey entered the low building, a Russian orderly who could speak German cried: "All right you men, line up for examination."

The Nazi prisoners complied.

"I'll take the officers first," ordered Mickey.

"Officers fall in up front," shouted the orderly again.

Mickey placed his kitbag in one of the pine compartments on the long examining table of bare pine. He removed his blouse and hung it up on a hook and put on the long, white coat that it replaced.

The first ten men Mickey examined were officers; the eleventh was Von Starheim.

"Well," said Mickey by way of greeting. "Fancy meeting you here, Von Starheim."

The German's eyes glowed with the hate that was born in a University classroom in Germany, and the kind of hate Mickey knew would be carried into eternity.

"I won't stay here very long, Tchekov," replied the man bitterly. "I don't like the place; and I don't like the people."

"Oh, you'll get used to us," encouraged Mickey. "We're not like the Nazis at all. We treat our prisoners with kindness and medicine. Not with bullets and bayonets."

"I'll stake my life that I'm not in this prison camp twenty-four hours," boasted the German.

"Come now," said Mickey. "You should be a good guest if you want your host to treat you with affability. If you have any information that would be helpful to him, as long as you accept his hospitality and his food, you should reciprocate in kind."

sion burning in the man's soul; the passion to kill. Mickey became serious as he applied the stethoscope to the Nazi's broad chest. Why couldn't Americans be like that? This man represented the most hateful thing on earth; the domination of races and peoples so far superior to the Nazi stupidmen that it was a pleasure to kill for the ambition. Yet great nations went down in the mad onrush of Heinie brutality only because they were not trained as the Nazis were; to destroy everything opposing them in their insane path; to kill everything that lived whether it was a simple flower, or an innocent child that chanced to be under its stiff, unrelenting, goosestepping, hobnailed boots.

Mickey examined Von Starheim from head to feet.

"Your luck seems to be with you, Von Starheim," he said. "You're in pretty good shape."

"I intend to continue to be," replied the man, his chest expanding with arrogant Nazi pride.

"You look a lot better fed than most of the officers I've just examined," remarked the American.

"And why not?" asked Von Starheim. "I am a Staff officer."

"Well," Mickey observed, "You always did take good care of that body of yours. Even at Breslau."

Von Starheim's face darkened.

"I haven't forgotten Breslau," said Von Starheim bitterly. "I swore to kill you then for disgracing me at the University, and now that we are at War, my job will be a lot easier."

"You disgraced yourself, my friend," reminded Mickey. "Your arrogance got you into trouble not only with me, but with the faculty as well. If you were asked to resign the fault lay with you, not with me."

"I would not have suffered the ridicule from the other students if you

MICKEY looked at Von Starheim. He could see fires of intense pas-

had fought honorably," replied Von Starheim.

"Fighting honorably, as you put it," said Mickey, "is not in the Nazi category. It is also a matter of geography. In my country we fight with our fists; not with broadswords. If I were a German—which, thank God, I am not—I might have fought you that way—and killed you."

The Nazi stiffened.

"You would never have killed me," he snapped.

Mickey looked down and smiled.

"You forget my strength," he grinned.

Von Starheim had not forgotten. He remembered the terrific pummeling from Mickey's big fists. He remembered the unconcealed amusement on the faces of the other medical students when he appeared with his eyes blackened; a gaping hole in the middle of an otherwise perfect row of teeth where Mickey had knocked a tooth or two off its foundation. But the American had taken the German's taunts at the University, his bragging arrogance of his Aryan superiority over the American Indian as he had called him, until even a patient Yankee must defend his good name. So Mickey slapped Von Starheim's face.

VON STARHEIM'S seconds called on the American. He had the choice of weapons. He chose to use his fists. Von Starheim had no alternative. He had to fight with his fists. The count reached almost a thousand—or it could have—before he could mutter: "Where am I?" Even his seconds laughed at that. And so did the whole medical studentry. It made the proud Von Starheim forget his medical career; but not the students who laughed; nor Mickey Tchekov. When the Nazi Party came into power, six of the students died in concentra-

tion camps for their laughter. Von Starheim became a respected member of the Nazi party, gained power, and began seeking typical Nazi revenge. He had one more to go; that was Doctor Mikhail Tchekov, the American "Indian."

But there was nothing Indian about Mickey, except his fine body; his enduring strength. Though these were not inherited from any Indian ancestry but from a father and mother of Kuban Cossack descendancy. Mickey's father was a Causasian, who, with his wife, had migrated to New York City where, in the lower East Side, Mickey was born to them.

Mickey's father prospered and his son enjoyed all the fruits of a free American education even to the scholarship which sent him to Breslau University for postgraduate medical work.

When the War broke out, Mickey enlisted in the United States Army and because he spoke Russian and German fluently, was sent to Iran with the first American contingent to await further orders.

The Soviet Union declined the use of American soldiers to protect Russian soil, but they did accept many American medical officers, when the German 1942 summer offensive started and medical men were at a premium in the Soviet.

With a number of other Americans who could speak Russian and German, Mickey was shipped up the Caspian Sea to Mackhack in the Caucasus. There he entrained on the Transcaucasian Railway and later disentrained at Amavir where one of the largest of the Caucasian Hospital units was based. It was there many of Russia's captured Germans were imprisoned in a camp on the outskirts of the town.

No. Von Starheim had not forgotten Mickey's strength. Nor the disgrace that strength had caused.

"How can I forget your strength," the Nazi replied, "when it caused me the loss of my career? Do you think I shall ever forget that?"

"Probably not," agreed Mickey. "You're not the type. You lost your career not through any beating I might have given you, but through your foolish Nazi pride." He looked down at Von Starheim significantly. "I'd advise you to forget that around here."

"I won't have time to forget it here," smirked the Nazi. "I won't be here long enough. My Army is driving South. They've smashed Krasnodar. They are not far from the Maikop oil fields. Once in Maikop, this place will crumble like an egg crate." The man could not help licking his chops at the prospect. "Then, my friend, you will not be too far away for me to get satisfaction."

THE news was bad from the direction of Maikop. The German Army was pushing down on it and driving the dauntless Russians back deeper into the Caucasus. Amavir was less than seventy-five miles from Maikop to the southwest of it.

Back at the hospital, Mickey sat with his superior officer.

"I'm not an alarmist, Sir," he said, "but in the face of the information we are getting from Maikop—and that from our bragging Nazi friend, it would seem to me that evacuating our wounded up the Kuban River to Batalpashinsk where they will be a lot safer—at least for a while—is the pressing thing to do."

"That will be difficult, Captain Tchekov," replied the Chief Surgeon. "You must remember that the Kuban flows down from the Elbrus Mountain. To embark for Batalpashinsk will be driving against the strong current. Our boats are small and too few."

"I think we still have time to get

more boats, Sir," replied Mickey. "I know where there are at least a dozen of them; motorized."

The telephone jangled on the Chief Surgeon's desk. He answered it. Mickey watched him. The man's face grew serious, as he listened to the squeaking voice which came through to the American. The conversation was short and snappy. When the Hospital Commandant turned to Mickey, his eyes were aglow with an anxious light.

"You were right, Captain," he said. "Orders have just come in. We must evacuate at once. Do you think you can get those boats?"

Less than one hour later, with the help of a dozen Russian guards, Mickey had the motorboats tied to the hospital dock. The whole place had suddenly come alive. Stretcher bearers, nurses, doctors, assistants, orderlies and hospital attendants were bringing out the wounded and laying them on the ground to wait their turn to be put aboard the boats.

Von Starheim had not lied. Maikop had fallen to the Germans. Gunfire, light and heavy, could be heard not more than twenty miles away. The vanguard of the retreating Russians appeared less than five miles to the West across the Kuban Steppes. Motorboats of all sizes lined the docks and part of the shore line. Soon one of the motors roared over the noise of distant gunfire and the boat moved out with the wounded and nurses packed as tightly as they dared.

Mickey Tchekov, his kitbag in hand, rushed from one stretcher to another, and helped the wounded men where he was needed. One by one the boats were filled. But the job was a slow one. The gunfire drew closer to the little town at the River's edge; and the hospital that nestled at the base of the foothills of the Caucasus Range.

As Mickey looked toward the South,

he saw Mount Elbrus towering toward the sky, over eighteen thousand feet above them. Not much higher than the mountain, he caught a glimpse of smaller objects. Their noses were pointed in his direction. Suddenly the noses dipped. The objects started a mad dive earthward. The sound of Jumo engines ripped the atmosphere over the hills. Mickey shouted:

"Hurry! Hurry! Stuka dive bombers are tearing at the hospital!"

It was true. Those Nazi messengers of death were aiming their beaks for the Amavir Hospital roof and as they roared down in screaming fury, they unloosed their cargo of burning destruction upon the red cross that marked the roof of the building using it as a guide to place their bombs.

ONE by one they roared over. One by one they sent their black missiles of oblivion into the unprotected building. Blast after blast rocked the earth about it; geysers of white cots, hospital equipment, men and women, were blown through the roof to fall back to earth, lifeless, useless, twisted things. Fire rose through the roof and the flames licked at the side walls. Men were still bringing the wounded out in spite of the roaring inferno that soon made it impossible to return for more. Most of the wounded men and women were brought out. In the face of devastating fire from the Nazi machine guns, the boats were being loaded rapidly now, and moved up the river with their cargo of pain as rapidly as they could get away.

The five miles that separated the motorized Russian columns that were marching and riding in the direction of Amavir were soon obliterated and the light gun carriers blasted into action. They poured their antiaircraft shells at the roaring, diving Huns and caught two of them in their engines driving

them into the earth where they burned as they had caused the hospital to burn.

Men shouted orders across the open fields. Only one boat remained to be filled. The Chief Surgeon, the remaining nurses, and a small number of men who did not require stretchers boarded it. Several of the younger men gave up their places to the older doctors, and the nurses. Among them was Mickey Tchekov. He remained on the beach, to whatever fate destiny had in store for him.

Guns blasted all around him as the Russian anti-aircraft gun carriers rolled up to the field where a few minutes before the wounded men waited to be embarked. One of the boats seemed to be having motor trouble. It was filled with men and women attendants, nurses and doctors who attempted to protect the wounded men from the devastating machine gun fire. The motor on the boat finally coughed and gave up.

One of the Nazi pilots must have seen the boat in trouble. It made an excellent target for his front machine guns. He dived down on the boat from a height of five hundred feet firing all the way down, and racked and rocked it with burning tracer fire, felling the men and women who were still standing up. The small boat floundered a moment, and with the loss of buoyancy of live men and women and wounded soldiers, the small craft turned on its side flinging its stricken cargo into the Kuban River as it started to burn.

Three of the ack-ack guns concentrated their fire on the Nazi divebomber and the pilot had not time to pull out of the dive. As he attempted to pull the nose of the heavy ship up, his tail section struck the water and the impact twisted it beyond further use. With full engine on, throttle wide open and Jumo screaming, the plane pancaked as the pilot's cubicle was ripped apart

with the exploding ack-ack. The Stuka dived into the Kuban and sank, submerging the already dead pilot leaving the battered, twisted tail sticking up out of the water like a camouflaged cross.

Mickey turned to one of the other doctors who had stayed behind with him: "That couldn't have happened before that rat sank the hospital boat."

"Now we see why we must not lose this war," remarked the man. "That is only a sample of what the Nazis will do to us if we do."

II

THE fires in the hospital building continued to rage. Walls collapsed and sent great geysers of burning embers showering over the guns still active on the grounds.

Mickey called his colleagues together under the protective shadow of a huge Soviet tank which stood by near the main road.

"I told Commandant Kousoff that we would try to join the unit at Batal-pashinsk. If we stick to our forces, I think we'll have no difficulty making it. What do you gentlemen think?"

"I think if we're to try joining our hospital unit," suggested one of the doctors, "we'd best start now. I see the Infantry is moving off."

Stormovik fighters took up where the ack-acks left off and were smashing at the remaining Stukas high overhead. The Russian Infantry unit continued on in its retreat recognizing now how little they could do to save the hospital. With pressure being brought upon them by advancing Nazi tanks and men, they started to gather their forces and move out of Armavir in orderly fashion, putting the torch to anything that still stood intact and maintaining their policy of leaving nothing but scorched earth behind them.

With Armavir in flames, the only

thing the Russians left standing was the prison camp. So fast was the onrush of the Nazis that the men of the Soviet had no time to put the torch to the buildings, or take the prisoners with them.

As Mickey drove on with his other officers in a small light truck, he saw Von Starheim on a box in the middle of the prison yard harranging the Nazi prisoners to take possession of the camp. He saw them break for the switches, cut off the current as they ran screaming about the yards at their liberation, and threw the unelectrified gates wide open.

That was the last thing he saw of Heinsel too. For the little German stood off from the mob; he let them run amok and stood calmly by watching them.

As the little car which carried Mickey and his medical colleagues drove into the green of the Caucasus hills, tanks clashed with tanks on the outskirts of Amavir. Shells dropped around them and blew dirt up on both sides of them. It fell back and smeared their uniforms. Some of the dirt blew into the driver's eyes and blinded him. The car veered off the road and drove up a small mound. An 88 millimeter shell from a Nazi tank dropped just behind the veering truck and drove its nose into the ground just beneath it. It blew up and carried the rear of the small car with it. The occupants were blown over the greenery of the Caucasian countryside. The driver was killed instantly. Two of the other doctors lay quite still where they fell. Three of them came through; one of the three was Mickey Tchekov.

When he regained consciousness, and opened his eyes, he was still in the hills. A familiar face, looked down upon him. Gradually it fell into focus. A familiar voice spoke as if it were relieved.

"I'm glad you're alive," it said. "I

hated the thought of anything or anyone else killing you. I wanted that distinctive pleasure for myself."

IT WAS Von Starheim. And he held a Leuger in his hand. The man had spoken truthfully. He did not stay a prisoner in the Russian camp twenty-four hours. In fact, he had not been a prisoner half that time.

"Hello, Von Starheim," muttered the still dazed Mickey. "I'm surprised you didn't put a bullet into me while I couldn't fight back. That is typically Nazi, isn't it?"

The Nazi's eyes narrowed venomously.

"I wanted you to know that it was I who did the job," replied Von Starheim. "Now that you are conscious, I would do it but I have too many of my men around me to see it. It might shock their sensitive souls to see me put a bullet through you here."

"I'm sure it would," replied Mickey. "They're so unused to it."

Von Starheim ordered the men to cover Mickey and take him back to the prison camp which had temporarily held him a prisoner.

As Mickey rose to his feet, he found his kitbag lay a mass of debris not far away.

"That's no good any more," he remarked dully.

He looked about him at the other unconscious and dead men.

"What are you going to do with these men," he asked.

"Oh, they'll be taken care of," said Von Starheim.

"Why don't you let me see if they're alive," he asked.

"No need for that," replied the Nazi. "They're all dead. All but you," he smiled, as if in gratitude to a good Nazi Rosenberg-created God.

One of the other doctors stirred. Mickey dropped to his knees and

turned him over.

"Get up!" ordered Von Starheim threateningly.

Mickey looked up and saw the man aiming a Leuger at him. "But you can't let this man lie here and die," he remonstrated.

"I said he'll be taken care of!" shouted Von Starheim furiously. "Now get on with you."

As Mickey entered the gates of the prison camp he could hardly help smiling weefully. The uniforms of the men now walking the yard were changed from German greygreen to Russian mudbrown. The Heinies were out; the Vodkas were in.

It was a strange metamorphosis; but that was the fortune of War.

Mickey wondered how the boats with the wounded men, the doctors and nurses who escaped with them fared; and if they succeeded in reaching Batalpashinsk and safety. He hoped so, though he doubted it because of the rapidity of the German onslaught.

His uniform was a bit battered with the recent explosive experience; but he himself was none the worse for it though he was a bit shaken up. The Nazi Commandant of the Prison Camp sent for him.

"I understand you are a good doctor," he began.

"I have a fair reputation," replied Mickey. "I finished my studies in Breslau."

"Oh," said the man perking up. "Breslau. Then you must be good."

"Not necessarily," explained Mickey with meaning. "Not everything that comes out of Germany is good." Then he added significantly. "Lately, in fact, not anything."

THE Commandant eyed Mickey a few minutes with eyes that were not unkindly. In fact, he half-smiled good-naturedly at the American's at-

titude. He might have taken offense but he did not. He dropped the German language and to Mickey's amazement spoke a perfect American English.

"I can understand how you feel, Captain," he smiled. "There are still a few of us left with some human instincts."

Mickey eyed the man with surprise.

"I see you've been to the States," he said quietly.

"I had a large family in Berlin," explained the Nazi Colonel. "I had a lot of money; large business interests in Philadelphia and in Berlin and Hamburg. It was suggested I cooperate with the Party. I saw Daschau for my relatives if I didn't. So here we are."

Mickey didn't know why but he liked the man and his frankness. He apologized for his seeming brusqueness.

"Oh, that's all right," replied the Commandant. He seemed a little weary. He looked at Mickey's uniform. "It seems strange seeing that uniform here in Russia." Then he added quietly, quoting a famous American patriot: "If this be treason, they can make the most of it; but I like seeing it over here."

Mickey smiled.

"I think we understand each other, Sir," he said. "Now how can I serve you?"

The man took his tunic off.

"First you can relieve me of this boil under my arm," he said. He pointed to a table. "That medical kit will be yours."

While Mickey operated the man talked.

"There is a shortage of medical officers with my unit," he said, "I'll have to ask you to take care of the Russian prisoners. My own men will take care of our soldiers. However; if we need your services there you will be called upon."

Mickey concentrated on the wound and nodded his head in understanding. A low clucking sound dropped from his mouth. The Nazi looked at him in wonder as he winced with a momentary shock of pain.

"What was that?" asked the German.

"I always do that when I've done a job satisfactory to myself," Mickey replied. "I've just removed the core. You'll be all right now."

"Of course," went on the Nazi Commandant, "You'll still be a prisoner and have the status of prisoner in spite of the freedom you will have in making the rounds of the camp."

He looked at Mickey thoughtfully as the young American applied a compress to the wound and placed a roll of bandage to it clamping it in place. He watched Mickey as he rolled the bandage about his arm, and added: "With all that freedom, you will naturally think of escaping. . . ."

"Naturally," agreed Mickey.

The Nazi smiled.

"You will be pursued," he warned.

"Those are the chances I'll have to take, Sir," Mickey grinned. He finished his job. The medical kit the Commandant had given him was complete. It was assembled with typical German preciseness for every field emergency.

"There you are, Sir," Mickey said. "What next?"

"Report to my Chief Surgeon," he said. "He will assign you to your job."

The Chief Surgeon was unlike the Colonel. He was brusque, almost to offensiveness. But Mickey did not mind the man. He was used to Nazi arrogance. When the man learned that Mickey had studied in Breslau, he softened a little. But not much.

THE American was assigned to the Russian prisoners. The men liked

that. They had heard of the American doctors who had come up from Iran and were doing a fine job. They had heard of Mikhail Tchekov, the American born of Russian parents, and heard that he was an excellent man.

He looked about him for Von Starheim, but the man was nowhere to be seen. He asked the German Sergeant of the Guard about him. The man knew Mickey and liked him. He had treated him for a swollen gland and reduced the pain and size so quickly, that the man asked him if he could do anything for him.

"Yes," replied the American. "I haven't seen Captain Von Starheim all day. Has he been transferred?"

"Oh, yes," the Nazi Sergeant replied. "He was given a company of two hundred men with machine guns to go out and find the Guerrilla Koslovitch. They say he and his band have been picking off our men like flies. I suppose he's somewhere up in the mountains looking for him."

Mickey had examined all the Russian prisoners; had talked to them of Koslovitch, and one by one they stuck their tongue in their cheeks and smiled knowingly.

No. They had not seen Koslovitch. But they had heard of the exploits he and his little band of fifty, had perpetrated. They had sniped at Nazis for months and sent more than their quota back to Germany in pine boxes, when their bodies were found or, with transportation from the Caucasus difficult, saw them laid to rest under Russian soil. They believed that all good Germans were those laid to rest under any soil.

The Russians told him of many things Koslovitch had done; destroyed and airdrome; smashed a hundred Stuka divebombers on the ground; blew up an ammunition dump; and many other equally dangerous and coura-

geous pieces of destruction.

In making the rounds two days later, he found a new man—or rather, a boy—in one of the prison tents. No one knew how he got in—not even his tent mates, and they didn't ask questions. He was there—and he was wounded.

Mickey examined the boy.

"Where did you get this," he asked in Russian.

The boy did not answer. He merely scrutinized Mickey's face in an effort to discover what he wanted to find there.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" asked the American.

"You are Mikhail Tchekov," asked the youngster. His dark Caucasian eyes continued to gaze piercingly at the American.

"Yes," replied Mickey quietly. The other prisoners had stepped out of the tent. He saw their shadows plastered against the canvas, as if standing guard over it. "Yes, I am Mikhail Tchekov. Why do you ask?"

"You will come with me tonight," the boy replied. It was the tone of authority. It was not a request but an order.

MICKEY looked at the youth. He was ragged. Not in uniform; slightly dirty with the mud of the Caucasus caked on his leather boots split at the vamp. As Mickey dressed the flesh wound, on the boy's arm, he said:

"That sounds like an order."

"It is an order, Comrade," said the boy. He could not have been more than fifteen; in years, that is, but in attitude, experience, the boy seemed a hundred. Mickey had never met anyone quite like him before and he studied the bronzed, serious face that bore the marks of great responsibility.

"If I should refuse to go with you," asked Mickey.

"You cannot refuse," the boy told

him firmly. "We are comrades with one aim; to destroy the Nazi lice and everything they stand for if we are ever to have peace in this world again." His eyes narrowed a little as if he was determined to have his way no matter what it cost. "You will not refuse."

Mickey smiled at the boy's confidence; his self-assurance.

"How do you know we can get out of here?" he asked.

A wise smile crept over the small face; his lips became compressed with a tinge of contempt. "I got in," he boasted. "We'll get out. You leave that to me."

"Who sent you to me?" asked Mickey.

"Koslovitch, the Guerrilla," replied the boy suddenly. "His band needs a doctor. You are the only one we know of here we can trust. Besides," he added, "You are an American. You represent everything all free men admire, and respect and love and die for." The boy's eyes shone with an almost holy light. "Koslovitch loves his country and is ready to give his life for it. Just as your countrymen did in 1776. You can't refuse to help him or his wounded men."

Mickey knew right then and there that he couldn't.

"What time shall I meet you and where?" he asked putting the finishing touches to the job of patching up the boy.

"Here, at this tent," he said. The tent stood on the end of the line near the barbedwire enclosure.

"What time?"

"At twelve o'clock," replied the boy. "They change the guard then and for five minutes there is no one near this tent."

"The barbedwire is electrified," warned Mickey.

"I know. I have a pair of insulated wirecutters. We'll cut our way through."

"I don't need to do that," explained Mickey, "I have the freedom of the camp. I'll meet you on the other side."

"That won't do," replied the boy. "You will be followed. Do it my way and we'll have no trouble."

Mickey had never met so positive a person before. The kid certainly had what it takes to lead men, he thought. Someday this youngster would be a figure in Russian politics, he expected. Mickey agreed. He would meet the boy at the appointed place and hour.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"You can call me Feodor," the boy replied. "And—oh, yes. Fill your bag with plenty of bandages and other medical supplies we'll need for our men."

"That's the simplest part of the job," replied Mickey.

AT FIVE minutes to twelve that night, Mickey approached the tent at the end of the line. As he reached the middle of the tent street, he was halted by a sentry. He moved closer to the man so that he could be recognized in the dark. His bag hung heavy in his hand.

"I've a patient with a high fever in the last tent," he explained. "I'm just going to look in on him."

"Very well, Herr doktor," replied the sentry. "I'm sorry I stopped you. Pass."

"Thank you," said Mickey. "Can't be too careful these dark nights."

"Quite right, Sir," agreed the man.

As Mickey entered the tent, the four men lay on their strawfilled mattresses on the tent floor.

"Feodor," whispered Mickey.

"Ready," replied the boy in a whisper. "Is the coast clear?"

"I'll see," answered the American. He pushed the tent flap cautiously aside and peered out. He turned around and whispered, "All clear."

Feodor dropped to his knees; looked

out and crawled to the barbedwire fence. He hesitated in some tall grass near one of the fence posts as the guards changed places. He waited a few breathless moments and with thickly rubber-gloved hands he grasped the electrically charged wire near the ground and lifted it high enough to allow his body to pass silently through. Mickey followed after passing his bag through the large opening Feodor made for him. Carefully the young Russian replaced the wire against the post. So skillfully did he do the job that even in broad daylight, it would not be discovered.

"So that's how you got in," whispered Mickey.

"Come," whispered Feodor, "and keep well down to the ground." The noise of boots on gravel reached them. "Down!" commanded the boy and automatically, as though he were accustomed to complying with the other's orders, Mickey dropped to his knees and hid in some underbrush.

The black shadow of the sentry retracing his path outside the enclosure passed not more than five feet away. They waited with bated breath until the man was out of ear shot.

"Come!" whispered Feodor, and grabbing Mickey by the arm led him on the double to a clump of maple trees about a hundred yards away and to a small thicket of willows that lined the Kuban River about a half miles from the camp.

They reached one large tree set back from the river. Its foliage was denser than the others. Like a monkey, agile, strong, Feodor disappeared into the branches above and soon descended with a large bundle.

"Help me with this," he commanded.

Mickey smiled at the boy's tone, but took his orders good naturedly. He helped him open up what proved to be a rubber boat. In the dark the youngster

found the valve. A second later, there was a sharp hissing noise as the boat took shape. This boy had evidently prepared for all emergencies.

"So this is how you got down here from the hills," said Mickey.

"I came down with the current from the Elbrus," explained Feodor. "I brought a gas bottle with me and hid it with the boat after I had deflated it." He finished the job of inflation. He looked toward the river. "It will be harder going back," he said. "We will have to row against the current."

"Where are your oars?" asked Mickey.

"I hid them in that farthestmost tree," he indicated pointing to a willow on the edge of the river whose branches and leaves were kept wet as they dripped into the Kuban.

THEY carried the rubber boat and set it down under the deep shadow of this willow. Feodor climbed into the tree and returned with two small paddles and another object.

"What else have you got there?" asked Mickey curiously.

"A submachine gun," explained Feodor.

"You thought to bring everything, didn't you?"

"I have to get you back to the men," explained Feodor.

"And to Koslovitch," added Mickey.

"And to Koslovitch," agreed Feodor.

It was more difficult to paddle up the fastrunning current of the restless Kuban that even Feodor had anticipated. Both men paddled desperately against the rapidly moving waters that roared down from the great mountain. They kept inshore for the resistance was lessened there by its close proximity to the banks. The paddling was less difficult.

Dawn broke over them as they continued to paddle up the stream that was

less than a half mile wide. It was broad daylight when they rounded the bend in the River and came upon the railroad bridge that crossed it while they were still several miles from Batal-pashinsk.

Mickey remembered that his hospital unit had escaped to there. At least, he thought they were still there but Feodor told him:

"They were driven out again and have gone on to Pyatigorsk where our Kuban Cossacks are holding the Germans back," he told Mickey. "Just how long they can hold out there I don't know. But they are determined not to let the Nazi rats infest more of the valley than they can help."

As the boat reached the trestle that held the railroad tracks above the Kuban, Feodor ordered: "Stop paddling," and grabbed for one of the piles on the south bank of the river.

"This is as far as we dare go now on the river," he said, "in broad daylight. We'll hide the boat under the bridge and go to one of the collective farms nearby where many of the farmers are getting ready to evacuate their farms for places out of the hattle areas. We may be able to get a lift from there to the foothills around Elbrus."

He drew the boat up the bank under the trestle and deflated it. Feodor rolled it up and hid it under a depression that was hardly observable even when one stood near it.

"You seem to know this country pretty well, Feodor," remarked Mickey.

Feodor was not a braggart. He spoke as one having authority; but there was no arrogance in his replies. He was a strange youth, Mickey observed. All the boy said was:

"Pretty well."

They walked up to a woman collectivist farmer who was loading a wagon with her furniture, bedding, and what food she had left. With her was her

son of ten. Her head was wrapped in her shawl of wool; the youngster's close cropped head was covered with a home-made cap.

Feodor strode officiously over to the woman. He was not much more than a child himself in years. Mickey saw him whisper something in the woman's ear. She clapped her hand to her mouth as if to suppress a scream of delight and prevent her shouting the thing he had whispered to her. She looked toward the young American doctor in a now water-stained, mudspattered American uniform and grinned happily. He heard her say in her native Russian:

"Of course, I'll help. With all my heart—with all my life if necessary."

THAT was the Soviet man or woman's cry. It rose in every corner, light or dark, in the nation. It was the cry that would one day send the Nazi hordes reeling back to the ratholes in Germany from whence they had come.

"She will take us right to our destination," Feodor told him. "Isn't that nice?"

They helped the woman load her wagon, leaving a space in the center of the cart for themselves to step into. She put the finishing touches to the job by throwing her bedding in over them as they crouched, completely hidden even from possible searchers.

The woman gave them a whole loaf of black bread and some milk and as the wagon dragged along the stretch of road winding through the foothills of the Caucasus, the mountain undulated for miles ahead of them, their tips snow-crested and white; their bases green-carpeted, and brown.

Across the Kuban Steppes they rode; the two chestnut colored horses drawing the cart behind them; and behind the cart two cows and several sheep and pigs followed in their wake.

"Her husband is a member of Koslovitch's Guerrillas," explained Feodor. "He is lying wounded in the cave and she was going to him to help nurse him. When I told her who you were, Comrade, it made her very happy."

"I'm glad of that," said Mickey.

Through a very tiny crack in the piled up goods over his head and on all sides of him, Mickey could see the winding mountain pass over which the cart was plodding several hours later stretch far to the West. Beyond that, he caught a glimpse of the glacial peak of Mount Elbrus.

"You came a long way to get a doctor," remarked Mickey to his young companion.

"I tried two other places first," explained Feodor. "One was Pyatigorsk, the other Batalpshinsk. I was told they could spare none, but that you and four other doctors were taken prisoner and would probably be available if I could get you out." He smiled a boyish smile; the first Mickey had seen on the youngster's serious face. "Well," he added, "here you are."

Mickey laughed.

But the laugh was cut short. Automobile engines suddenly snorted in upon them. The sound of them drove down from the hills. With a roar they were upon the little wagon and seemed to be coming upon them from all sides. A man shouted in Russian at the woman.

"Stop!" he cried. "Stop your wagon!"

The cart was pulled up short. The furniture and bedding and other of the woman's belongings shifted but not sufficiently to expose the hidden men. Feodor reached for the machine gun at his feet. His grip fastened upon the stock. Mickey could see a peculiar light creep into the boy's eyes; his bronzed face darkened; his jaw tightened with grim determination. The Russian had a tinge of German as it

drifted through to them.

"Where are you going," the voice said.

"I am going to join my husband who is wounded," replied the woman truthfully.

"What have you got there on your cart," demanded the voice.

"Just my furniture, my bedding, a few pots and pans," she said calmly, "Nothing else."

MICKEY admired the woman's courage. She knew that if he and Feodor were uncovered by the Nazis, not only would they be shot on the spot, but the woman and her son would die with them. Yet her voice was steady, calm, emotionless.

"Search the wagon," cried the voice.

Mickey went hot and cold all over. They were sunk now, he thought. He and Feodor sank to the floor of the cart as pieces of furniture were yanked off the wagon and thrown to the ground.

Feodor raised the muzzle of his machine gun, readying it into position for attack. He might die, but he would not die alone.

"We are looking for Guerrillas," went on the voice. "Have you seen any on your way up here?"

"Oh, no," replied the woman.

"If you had you would tell us, wouldn't you, my good woman?" went on the man.

"Of course," she replied, "if you insisted on it."

"You're a filthy Russian liar," cried the man.

The unloading continued. Mickey and Feodor were perspiring in their anxiety. They did not want to be caught. They did not fear for themselves, but for the brave woman and the child with her. The Germans ripped off a bundle of bedding that roofed in the hidden men. They were getting closer to the men. For some

unknown reason they stopped with the first bundle of bedding. Had they lifted the second, they would have uncovered the two men.

The Heinie above stopped searching. The furniture and bedding were scattered about the road surrounding the wagon. Some of the lighter pieces were broken.

"Herr Oberst," he called down, "there is nothing but this filthy peasant stuff on this cart. The woman spoke the truth."

"Very well," cried the man. "Come down and let's get on."

"Yes, Sir," replied the man. He jumped to the ground. "Shall we put the stuff back?"

"Put the stuff back!" shouted the man. "What do you mean, you swine! Let the filthy peasant put it back herself!" He turned about and gave the command: "Forvarts!"

The motors in the German truck snarled into life; shifting gears ground raucously. One by one the trucks roared by and the noise of their guttural steely throats dimmed with the distance.

Mickey wiped his forehead with the back of his hand. He was too weak to reach for his kerchief behind him. He had recognized the man's voice.

It was Von Starheim.

III

"THAT was a narrow squeak," said Mickey rising from his cramped position on the floor of the cart.

Young Feodor too rose and stretched himself when the Nazis were out of sight. "You'll get used to them," he remarked philosophically.

"We'd better get down and help the woman repile her wagon," suggested Mickey.

"Not while the Nazis have powerful field glasses to pick us up with," said

the masterful youth. "She will have to do the job herself—to save us from a firing squad. We're not yet out of danger, you know," he reminded Mickey, even if those Nazi roaches are out of sight."

Mickey eyed the boy with unconcealed admiration. This youngster thought of everything.

The woman started putting back her furniture and other belongings. Thirty minutes later, the strange caravan was on its way. Mickey and Feodor were not as cramped this time for they had placed two small wooden chairs in the middle of the pile and they sat on them.

"How far is the camp from here," asked Mickey.

"We should reach the place sometime tonight at the speed we are going," said Feodor. "In about an hour or two she will turn off the road and take a route into the hills."

"She knows where the place is, I suppose," said Mickey anxiously.

"As well as I do," replied Feodor. "She could find it in the dark."

"I'd like to get out of this and stretch my long legs," said the American.

"When the woman turns into the hills," assured Feodor, "you will be able to."

But it took the slowed-up horses two hours to cross that part of the Steppes which lay south of the Kuban River and stretched like an endless green carpet to the base of the towering ranges. Off the mountain pass and in between two high precipitous hills the little caravan halted. They were well out of possible enemy territory now, and in deep enough for them to be sufficiently safe to start a small fire on which to cook a meal.

The woman removed the bedding and some of the other pieces of furniture and let Feodor and the American Army doctor whose legs were so cramped he

could hardly stand on them drop to the ground.

As Mickey looked off toward the undulating range of mountains, he drew in a deep breath of the crystal clear air. He pounded himself on the chest Tarzan fashion.

"It's good to get out of the hemmed in position we were in," he said stretching himself to his full height and yawning widely. The altitude, and the thinner, colder air made him feel a little drowsy.

Even the little youngster, who had been riding outside all the time, yawned as he watched Mickey. Feodor and the woman took some of the broken furniture and started a small fire. The cattle were released and permitted to graze. Mickey took the youngsters hand and they walked a short distance from the wagon. As the American gazed off at the gentle mist that hung over the mauve, green, gold, and white of the distant hills, he turned to the child beside him and said: "Now I know why the Don and Kuban Cossacks fight the way they do to save these mountains from the Nazi swine."

HIS eyes fairly glowed with the beauty of the scene. For a moment he thought he was home; back in the States where other and equally beautiful mountains rose in great goldenwhite peaks that looked out upon a blue Pacific.

They ate the heavy black bread and pot cheese the woman had made herself the day before, with a gusto that amazed even Mickey. He didn't realize he was that hungry. Water was boiled on the small fire and the cold chill was tempered in their bodies with hot Russian tea.

Late that night, the groaning vehicle with Mickey and Feodor riding on the tail board now, reached a cave in the hills near the village of Kislovodsk, to

the West of Pyatigorsk where the Kuban Cossacks held the Nazi lines whose eyes were turned toward the golden flow of the Grozny oil fields.

As the wagon approached it from a trackless field, it was stopped by a guerrilla guard of three men. When they saw who the woman was and whom she had with her, the men were elated. One of the men took the horses heads and led them to a narrow pass cut in two thousands of years before by descending glacial currents. In the dark, the narrow pass was completely obscured and would not possibly have been found even by the woman who had been there before. If the guard had not taken them in, Feodor would have led them. But the guard simplified the job. Feodor could remain with Mickey to identify him.

A few more winding turns in the dark and the wagon was halted. Mickey and Feodor dropped off the tail and Feodor preceded the American into the great, natural cavern that was recessed almost a hundred yards into the base of the hill. It was large and highvaulted; wide and rambling.

The place was fitted out like a dormitory, but not with modern fixtures. Not even the farms themselves could boast much of modern improvements; but there were beds of straw on both sides of the forward part of the cave; two or three roughhewn tables, and a dozen or more chairs brought up from the abandoned farms.

As Mickey entered with Feodor, a loud shout of welcome greeted them. Several wounded men lay in the beds on the floor of the cave; others were seated on them or on chairs cleaning their "little rifles"—as they called them, by flickering candle light. Although the cave was well set back in the hill, Koslovitch did not permit much light to be used in the hideout.

The woman and the small boy hur-

ried to the side of one of the wounded men. She dropped down beside him and threw her arms about his neck. So did the youngster. The man was glad to see them.

"We have a doctor now," the woman said. "You'll be made well again, my husband."

"That is good," replied the man. "Then I can take up the work of killing more Nazis."

Mickey came over to the man and brought his kit bag with him. Feodor joined him.

"So this is the place," said Mickey.

"This is the place," replied Feodor, "and these are the men." He made a sweep with his hand that took in all the wounded men on the floor.

FEODOR introduced Mickey to the men. There were about twenty-five of them. The others were out on a mission.

"I suppose Koslovitch, your leader is with the others," Mickey said turning to one of the men.

"Koslovitch," said the man puzzled.

"Yes," replied Mickey. "I understand he is quite a great guerrilla. One of the men at the prisoner's camp mentioned the fact that he had killed no less than two hundred and fifty Nazis alone by his magnificent sniping." Then he added quickly. "Of course, that doesn't include a few hundred others who died in train wrecks or explosions."

"You do not know Koslovitch?" asked the still puzzled Russian.

Mickey shook his head.

The man on the straw bed laid down the rifle he was cleaning, put his head back and laughed unroariously. The other men, hearing the conversation, also joined in the fun much to the chagrin which showed plainly on the American's face.

"Well," asked Mickey, "What's so

funny about that?"

"He doesn't know Koslovitch," shouted the man in a deep basso profundo that echoed to the ceiling above. A roar of laughter rose again.

Mickey turned appealingly to Feodor.

"They do not know," said the boy smilingly. "I must apologize for not telling you before, but—I am Koslovitch."

Mickey's eyes almost popped.

"You!" he almost yelled.

"Yes," said the fifteen year old guerrilla leader of the most hated and feared guerrilla band in that part of the Caucasus. "I am Feodor Koslovitch." He said it quietly; modestly.

Mickey eyed the boy a moment. Then he shook his head. "Now I've seen everything," he muttered.

He understood now what he couldn't understand before; the tone of authority in the boy's voice; never requesting a thing to be done, but ordering it; and getting it done without question or protest.

His reputation as a guerrilla fighter had given him a national reputation. He was known wherever a Russian defended a foot of his native soil against the Nazi invaders.

It was odd that a boy should lead men. But this was no ordinary boy. He was a born general; a splendid, natural strategist. There were geniuses or prodigies in other fields; why not in the art of war?

"Well," thought Mickey, "why not?"

He glanced back toward the rear of the cave. In the dim candlelight he made out over a hundred small wooden boxes. They contained dynamite and ammunition.

"That's dynamite, isn't it?" he asked.

Feodor nodded.

"If that stuff should suddenly decide to go up, some night," Mickey said, "There would be no further need here

for a doctor." Then he added smilingly: "In fact, there would be no doctor. No. And no guerrillas and no Koslovitch."

"You'll get used to sleeping with it," grinned the boy.

Mickey removed his coat.

"Well," he said in a most professional and doctor-like manner, "if we're going to put these men back on their feet, I think we'd better start now."

HE ROLLED up the sleeves of his shirt and went to work on the husband of the woman who drove them to the hideout. He had one of the tables cleared and the man placed on it. The woman provided clean sheets from her furnishings. Hot water was given him by one of the men young Koslovitch ordered to put on a fire. The man would need an operation. The right leg had received a nasty bullet wound; had turned gangrenous and would have to be removed.

The man screamed he'd die first; Mickey told him he would die if he didn't permit the operation. Koslovitch ordered it. The man quietly obeyed the young guerrilla. His eyes filled with tears; he agreed. He did not weep for the loss of the limb. He wept because he knew his days for defending his homeland were over.

Koslovitch was right. There would be a need for brave men who survived the holocaust to revivify Russia. Even if they had only one leg, they would still prove of inestimable value in the process of reconstruction that would follow.

The woman proved a good and able nurse. Although Mickey worked under a handicap; bad light; inadequate tools and supplies, the job was skillfully done.

The other men were not so seriously hurt. But they needed attention and lots of it. Mickey taught the woman

how to care for them. She was a most apt pupil; and an efficient worker.

Koslovitch's Guerrillas now had a guerrilla nurse—and a guerrilla doctor.

IV

MICKEY worked through the night on the wounded men. Dawn crept into the cave as it slipped down the pass from the opening in the hills above. As he stepped out for a brief smoke, through the gap he could see the peak of Mount Elbrus, eighteen thousand feet above him, and about five or six miles to the South.

The other twenty-five of Koslovitch's men trailed in during the night and dropped onto their beds of straw, tired, slightly disgruntled, for they could not find any Nazis to maraude. But their boy leader encouraged them. He would find something to do. Something important; vitally important.

It happened sooner than he dreamed. As Mickey stood in the pass and admired Mount Elbrus, one of the men who acted as lookout, brushed past him and dashed breathlessly into the cave shouting for Koslovitch.

Mickey, sensing some exciting event impending, followed on the man's heels. Out of breath, from his mad dash down the mountain from his lookout post, he gasped:

"Fifteen Nazi tanks. Stalled. They're fifteen miles North of Kislovodsk. They're headed South for Pyatigorsk and the German lines." He paused for breath. In his hand he held a pair of fifty-seven power German binoculars taken from a dead Nazi. These binoculars could make plain almost anything within fifty miles or more.

The man continued: "They seem to be out of fuel. They were draining the fuel tanks of those Mark III's which had more gas than the others, and filling the empty tanks of those which had not enough."

"Let's see them," said Koslovitch.

He grabbed the binoculars from the hand of the watch, and together they started for the entrance to the cave.

"Do you mind if I go along, Feodor?" asked Mickey.

"Not at all," the boy said. "But keep low as we climb the hill. I don't want you to be seen."

The three men crouched low as they climbed the side of the mountain through the brush and tall grass that grew upon it. They climbed for about two hundred feet and stopped by a tall pine whose branches were thick with needles and hid a small platform large enough for a man to sit on.

Because they were three, they did not climb to the seat but observed the distant Steppes from where they crouched. The guerrilla watch located the tanks and turned the binoculars over to the boy. He watched the spot a few minutes before he spoke.

"They're still dividing their fuel," he said as he pressed the glasses closer to his eyes.

He was much older than his years Mickey observed. He did not look like a boy at all but a little man. A sort of Napoleon without inhibitions or complexes.

Feodor swung the glasses over the panorama that unfolded in the lenses.

"They are the only Nazis for miles," he said. "The way they are dividing their fuel I don't think they will go far." He turned the glasses over to Mickey. "Take a look."

Mickey glanced through the binoculars.

FIFTEEN Mark III's, several on the road, others in the field at the side of the highway, were stalled and men in dirty, oily coveralls were handing each other small cans of gasoline drained from the tanks.

The American medical officer turned

the binoculars back to the guerrilla leader.

"They look vulnerable to me," he ventured.

"They are vulnerable," said Feodor. "Come!"

Back in the cave, the young fighter called his men together.

"Pavlovnik! Stavan! Volkov! Pushkin! Shostakovitch! Kudashkin!"

One by one the men fell into line and waited. They might have been guerrillas, but they were disciplined. The boy had insisted on military precision—and got it.

Feodor ordered the men to get shovels, picks, and other digging tools. He ordered others to take dynamite; others detonators; still others hand grenades. He turned to Mickey.

"You will join us, doctor," he said.

Mickey found he had another surprise in store for himself. Feodor led the men to another hill a short distance up the pass. He had walked so fast that he was about twenty yards in advance of the men when he suddenly disappeared. As the men approached the spot, the American saw another hole in the side of the hill.

Mickey waited outside as the men entered. Their guns were slung over their shoulders; their cargo held carefully in their hands. He stepped inside as the last of almost thirty men disappeared within. About fifty yards back, he heard stomping of heavy feet on the soft dirt floor. As his eyes grew accustomed to the dim light within, he saw two long lines of horses. These horses were the individual property—or had been before the war—of the Cossacks who made up Koslovitch's band.

Mickey stepped out into daylight again as Feodor Koslovitch walked two horses out into the pass. The horses blinked as they emerged into the sunshine.

"Can you ride?" he asked Mickey. "Not like a Cossack," said Mickey. "But I did play polo back in the States and I stayed in the seat."

Feodor smiled. "That is recommendation enough." He turned the reins of one of the saddled horses over to the American. "Here." Feodor was a boy of few words.

Mickey examined the girdle; mounted the horse and adjusted the stirrups to fit his long legs and walked the horse a little way down the pass to make room for the others to emerge from, and line up in front of, the cave for their orders.

"We will go to the outskirts of Kislodovsk," Feodor began. "Proceed five miles to the North of the village to the mountain pass those tanks will have to ride over if they ever hope to join their units." He turned to the men with the picks and shovels. "We'll dig traps for the tanks." He turned to the men with the dynamite and the grenades. "You will plant your dynamite and grenades carefully." He swung his horse in the direction opposite to that of the main cave and started a winding course in and out of depressions which hid the descending group from any possible observer.

FEODOR knew that country with the same expertness that Mickey knew the tracing of a nerve in the human body. He knew every knoll; every depression; every plain; every hill and mountain. He knew every cave; every farmhouse; every pass and road open or closed. This knowledge helped more than once to save the lives of his men. They knew this and trusted him implicitly; and carried out his every order with an undeviating faithfulness that Mickey no longer marvelled at. Because he now knew, understood and admired the young guerrilla leader.

The Kuban Cossacks rode their

horses as though they were a part of the animals. They rode out slowly at first. When they reached a stretch of open plain, they rode across the green with a speed that warmed the cheeks of Mickey Tchekov as the friction of the wind that flowed swiftly past rubbed the warmth back into the capillaries.

One hour later they reached their objective. It lay at the foot of a hill—in fact, the narrow pass lay between two hills. They tied their horses to the South side of the first of the hills, hiding them among a cluster of trees and about a half mile back.

Feodor sent a lookout to the top of the hill from which they worked to keep an eye for the approach of the German tanks. The spot cut them off ten miles in advance of the place where they had stopped to divide their gas. The guerrillas went feverishly to work. First with the picks; then with the shovels.

Thirty sincere men can dig a lot of holes in thirty minutes and when the dirt was cleared, the place in the middle of the road looked as though a two-ton bomb had dug the crater. The huge Mark III would fit into the gap nicely—and would have a lot of difficulty getting out.

Mickey watched the men plant their dynamite and set the detonators. When that job was done, others brought long, thin branches they had cut from the trees and placed them across the holes. This they covered with leaves and other foliage and made it look as though the wind had strewn the brown dirt pass. It was a magnificent job of earthy camouflage. A light layer of brown earth was thrown over the whole.

The holes dug in the side of the roadway were similarly treated. Only an expert in camouflage might suspect anything wrong. Mickey could see that the tank drivers would not.

"That's a magnificent job, Feodor," he said admiring the handiwork of the men.

"It is if it does the work it is intended to do," replied the boy.

With the job finished, Feodor ordered his men up to the top of the hill where they could observe without being seen themselves. As they were up the halfway mark, they saw the lookout coming down. He signalled to Feodor that the tanks were on the way.

It was about two hundred feet to the top and when they arrived there, the men flung themselves on the grass for a much needed rest—and waited. They saw the line of tanks lumbering slowly along, digging their steel caterpillar tracks in the soft Caucasian earth. They rode slowly on to conserve what little fuel they had.

MICKEY watched them from his place on the ground. Young Feodor seemed unconcerned. Soon the noise of the roaring Diesels reached them on the West wind. They lowered their heads deeper into the grass. From where the tanks rolled unsuspectingly along the pass, the guerrillas could not be seen.

Slowly, slowly on came the rumbling juggernauts. In Mickey's mind they seemed a lot of juggler that would soon be naughts. Mickey looked below to see if the wind had disturbed the camouflaging. From where he and the others lay hidden in the ground on the elevation, they could see up and down the road for miles. So perfectly had the job of laying the tank traps been done, that even he could not locate them. He smiled at the knowledge.

He turned to Feodor. "It looks as though they are right on top of the traps," he whispered. The tension that he felt all around him made him lower his voice. He actually thrilled at the experience. He had some difficulty con-

trolling his emotions. This being a guerrilla, he thought, was stimulatingly exciting.

All eyes were upon the steel caravan below. They watched the slow moving lead vehicle rumble and grumble on; its Diesel engine objecting strenuously to insufficient and inadequate nutrition.

Eagerly, anxiously, hidden eyes watched the scene hungrily. The heavy vehicle approached the main trap. The smell of burning oil rose to the men strewn about the grass. As their eyes followed the movement of the tank, there was a crashing sound that reached their ears; the tail of the tank rose suddenly into the air as the nose dived into the tank trap. The caterpillar tracks churned the edge of the hole and blew the dirt into the air like a dog kicking up the dust behind him.

A terrific grating sound followed as the driver reversed the direction of the tracks in an effort to get out of the hole, but the more he ground, the deeper he buried himself and his tank.

Mickey and the others laughed silently as they watched the tank dig in.

It was only a matter of seconds for this to happen. So close rode the others behind the illfated Nazi landcraft, that the tank that followed it directly behind had not sufficient time to turn out and piled up on the tank in the hole with a crash that rang through the hills for miles. Its caterpillar track ground desperately on the roof of its fallen brother. The driver here too reversed his gear. The tracks in reverse rasped and screamed like a dull file on an iron casting. As the tank drew back off the other, it backed into another and oncoming rumbler behind it; the tracks of both tanks locked and the teeth were stripped from them like the teeth from an old comb. And just as the second tank rolled from the one in the trap, the stripping teeth robbed of power of grip and locomotion, the huge craft

hung poised for a brief moment off balance, then toppled completely over on its side.

THE other tanks came on. The fourth tank, unable to pull up, crashed into the third tank which had just stripped it track teeth, and as the driver in the third tank again reversed his gear this time for forward motion, the impact of the fourth tank at his rear, and the propelling action of the track, drove him completely across the first and second tanks into another trap that lay buried just in front of the trap into which the lead tank had fallen.

General confusion, trapped Nazis shouting and screaming inside their tanks; steel crashing against steel, with the ringing noise mingling with the roar of racing Diesels; all this reached the eyes and ears of the men above and they laughed uproariously at the mad scene below. Laughed again and again as others, turning out and away from the piled up wreck, themselves dropped into other holes in the sides of the road and sank up to the tops of their boggie wheels.

Feodor raised his hand to one man with a detonator. He dropped it again quickly. There was a terrific explosion below; a blast of yellow flame lit up the first of the stricken tanks, and its seam opened wide as the steel rivets blew off the tank like the buttons on the vest of an overfed fat man.

Feodor repeated the maneuver. One of the other guerrillas pressed the plunger on the detonator and another tank was blown apart.

The tanks in the sides of the roads, in holes that were not as deep as the first, reversed their tracks and drew out of the holes. But they did not go far. As they rode over hidden grenades that blasted the tracks off the boggie wheels and left the huge death-dealing steel elephants without a means

of propulsion, the gas lines to the engines were also blown apart and the Diesels coughed, gasped and like many of the Nazi rats driving the craft died a permanent death.

Of the fifteen tanks that rode casually on, only six managed to get into the fields and safety. But even they did not move beyond the stricken tanks. Their engines gasped for want of fuel, and the tanks stalled where they were.

Two more detonator plungers were driven home; two more deafening blasts followed; two more tanks were blown apart and fire began burning all around them. Men in the tanks who could escape ran to cover. Some ran up the hill toward the place where the Russian guerrillas were concealed.

Feodor Koslovitch swung his arm again and called unto himself the sub-machine gunners. They fell on their faces as they watched the men coming up. Their guns were poised and waiting for the Nazis to get within range.

Mickey followed them down; his kit-bag in his hand. As he looked off in the direction of Pyatigorsk, toward the position in the Caucasus where the German lines were blasting at the Cossacks in an effort to bypass them to Grozny, Mickey saw two crawling objects about ten miles away. They were headed in the direction of the German tanks.

"Look, Feodor," Mickey said.

THE young guerrilla leader put his binoculars to his eyes. "Tankers," he said. "Nazi tanker cars with fuel for those crawling insects we've just blown apart."

Feodor signalled the gunners to retire. They scurried back to the top of the hill, and down the other side.

"Come!" he cried. And ran down the hill followed by the men who had quickly gathered their detonators and other equipment and ran to where their horses were tethered.

Mickey and Feodor were the first to reach their horses. They mounted and waited for the others, and together they drove off at a gallop to a place about three miles below the shattered tanks.

Feverishly they went to work to fell a huge pine tree which stood by the side of the road. In fact, they felled two huge trees and cut them so that when they toppled to the ground, they lay across the road and completely cut off the passage of the gas tankers.

When the trees lay comfortably across the only road in the vicinity, Mickey, Koslovitch, and the rest of the band of Cossack guerrillas darted for cover about twenty yards off the side of the road and waited.

They had not long to wait. Up the winding dirt highway rode the two tank cars carrying their load of gasoline through the Caucasian hills to the stricken tanks. Their dull green, circular, elongated steel bodies appeared and disappeared. The Russians in ambush waited until the fallen trees would halt the Nazi tankers.

As the cars reached the spot, their brakes squealed, their tires skidded along the highway and the trucks came to a full stop just in front of the obstructions.

Arming themselves with rifles, the men dropped to the ground and tried to run for cover. They knew this was an ambush and were taking no chances. Previous experience with Russian guerrillas had taught them to get under cover and get cover fast.

But these men were not fast enough. Hand grenades came hurtling at them from the pines; two struck one of the gas tanks. They blew up tearing a rent in the tank out of whose big, oval belly gasoline poured over the ground. A second later an explosion rocked the world about the ears of the Nazis as well as the Russians. Mickey thought his eardrums had split. His head sang

with the concussion.

Of the escaping tanker, the drivers were blown out of their cab; the tank rolled side over side down a small gulley and finished up on its top. A half dozen well directed hand grenades spread the tankers seams and blasted the tank apart and left it a raging mass of flames in the depression.

"That places those Mark III's just where they were when they were born," said the grinning Koslovitch, "empty and at the mercy of our divebombers. We'll leave it to them to finish them off."

The men left the trucks blazing where they blew apart and returned to their horses which they had hidden in a depression in the side of the mountain. Five minutes later their horses beat a muffled tattoo in the grass as they tore up the pathless heights to their cave.

V

WHEN the horses were put up, young Koslovitch and Mickey returned to the main cave to find an oxcart heavily loaded with ammunition and other munitions expertly hidden under a false load of hay.

Kopelnikov, the driver of the cart called Feodor aside. Mickey joined them at the boy's request.

"You can speak in front of the doctor," the boy said. "What is it?"

"Three things that you should know," began the driver. "One: A Captain Von Starheim with a party of two hundred Nazi dogs are scouring these mountains in search of you and your men. Two: They are also looking for an escaped American doctor who was their prisoner. Three: Tomorrow night—or rather, about two o'clock tomorrow in the morning, an ammunition train will pass your allotment on the Rostov-Baku Railway from the direc-

tion of Rostov. It will be headed for the German lines near Pyatigorsk."

"It will be headed for the lines, my friend," replied the boy, "but I promise you it will never reach them."

The other guerrillas in the meantime were unloading the cart.

"Is this the doctor the Nazis are looking for?" asked the oxcart driver.

"I'm the doctor," replied Mickey.

"Be careful, my friend," warned the man. "That man Von Starheim takes no prisoners. He's dangerous—and what is more, he is elusive."

"Have you tried to capture him?" asked Mickey.

"We have," replied the driver. "But he seems to know these mountains as well as we do. And he always gets away. He spent several years in the Caucasus during his younger years on various missions for industrial firms during his college vacations, I am told," explained the Oxcart driver further. "That is why he is so successful in evading us."

"I know the man well," said Mickey. "We were at the Breslau University together when I was a medical student there."

"He is said to have sworn to kill you with his own hands," added the driver.

"He will have to catch me first," smiled Mickey.

"In the meantime," injected Feodor, "We'll see what we can do to dispose of him."

"I'm joining you on your job of train blasting, am I not?" asked Mickey.

"I insist on it," smiled Feodor. "One never knows when our own men may need medical attention in the field."

"That satisfies me," replied Mickey. "If you hadn't insisted on it, I should have. If I'm going to doctor guerrillas, I may as well be one."

gang information of Nazi troop and supply movements. A member of the Soviet counterespionage system, it was his business to know many things and to convey what he learned to the men most closely involved in their execution. That is, if any particular job of destruction is to be performed as a result of what he has learned. And usually some job of Nazi baiting and blasting followed.

The woman who had brought Koslovitch and Mickey to the cave proved to be better than even Mickey had hoped. The men under her care were doing splendidly. Three of them had been put on their feet and were back in service. Her own husband was still confined. Their little son kept him entertained when she was attending the others, or assisting Mickey with his work of making repairs on the men.

It was midnight the next night when twenty of the men headed by young Feodor Koslovitch and with him in the lead, one Mikhail Tchekov—Mickey, for short—a guerrilla doctor—rode out of the pass down the side of the mountain in the direction of the Rostov-Baku Railway to a point midway between Pyatigorsk and Batalpashinsk. The ride took them almost an hour and a half. They would not need much time to set their time bombs. About fifteen minutes would be adequate.

A dense overcast obscured the light that might otherwise have come from the Caucasian moon. As the twenty rode on, those who did speak seemed affected by the stillness that hovered about them, above them and all around them.

Even the hoofbeats of their horses were muffled on the soft grasscovered earth.

There was no need for Feodor to ride back and warn his men carrying the bombs and dynamite they would lay waste the railway with that they

THIS was not the first time the oxcart driver had brought the Koslovitch

should be doubly careful with their horses. There was always the danger of their tripping on a stone concealed underfoot. But a single misstep might send the twenty of them where the Nazis would like to see them; and they had a job to do first. He warned them to keep a tight rein on the horses.

They had been out an hour when Mickey asked young Feodor: "How much farther?"

"Not much," replied the young Russian. "About another half hour when we will come to a bend in the railway. This bend cuts through a natural pass in the hills." He turned and smiled at the impatient American. "Be patient, my friend. Are all you Americans so eager to get at the enemy?"

"We are," Mickey assured him. "A hundred and thirty million of us. And we're eager to get it over with and go home."

Feodor was careful to keep to the lower hills and passes so that his approach to the railway might not be seen. He avoided the peaks. One hour and a half later, the guerrillas dismounted and tethered their horses to a cluster of maples about a half mile from the tracks. The young guerrilla leader sent one of his men on ahead to see if the road was clear. He returned and reported in the affirmative.

CAREFUL not to drop one of their bombs, they hurried on to the railway tracks; separated into small groups and began working feverishly among the ties. They did not—dared not, use lights. They worked as best they could. It was not more than a matter of ten minutes when they had buried their bombs after setting them to go off in twelve minutes from the time of setting.

For a distance of three hundred feet bombs were laid alternately from one side of the tracks to the other. No train could escape destruction, on a dis-

tribution of solid death such as that.

Feodor gave the signal for the men to beat a hasty retreat. They scrambled up the sides of the depression and together they ran rather than walked that half mile that separated them from their horses and impending death.

They jumped into their saddles and whipping up the animals rode off without Feodor's checking their number to see if they were all there. This was unusual. But with the bombs to go off in so short a time, they decided to count off in the cave.

They stampeded in the direction of the cave and were not gone out more than three or four miles when the sound of a locomotive reached them on the wind that drove across from the North.

They slowed their horses to a walk; turned about in their saddles and watched, the distant, darkened train's black silhouette crawled through the night. The long shaft of steam which flowed behind it and trailed the long line of flat cars with its exposed cargo was the only thing visible when the fire door was thrown open and the fireman recoiled. That was on only for a moment and was blotted out when the man had reclosed his fire door.

From where the little band stood now, they watched the slow train lumber into the pass and gradually disappear completely from view.

"Quick," called Feodor to the others. "Dismount. Make your mounts lie down and flatten out near them yourself. When that train blows up, there won't be a thing left standing within a radius of miles." He looked at the luminous dial on his watch. "Hurry!" he ordered. "There is only two minutes left."

As the men hurriedly dismounted and dropped to the ground with their mounts, Mickey counted nineteen men and nineteen horses. He turned and shouted over his horse's flank to Feo-

dor: "One of your men is missing."

"Who is it?" called the boy. "Who's missing?" His voice sounded anxious.

"I'd suggest the men here name themselves," urged Mickey.

The men repeated their names one by one. The missing man was Pavlovitch.

Without a word, Mickey slapped his horse's rump and the beast struggled to his feet. Mickey grabbed up his kitbag and jumping into his saddle shouted to Feodor: "I'm going back. He may be in trouble and need me."

BEFORE he even realized his danger, and the certain death he was returning to to save a possibly stricken man, he kicked his horse below the girthline and the animal darted off like a streak in the direction of the bomb planted railway to the shouts of "NO! NO! Stay here; don't go!" from the prostrate men.

But Mickey had not heard. And if he did, he completely disregarded his danger and drove his horse on toward the pass four miles ahead.

The sound of the locomotive exhaust seemed dimmer now. Not so much with distance as the muffled effect that comes as the train passes through a tunnel or a depression between high hills.

This served to accentuate the sound of the horses hoofs beating echoless on the padded grass under his feet.

The sound of the dull hoof beats; the muffled heart beat of a laboring locomotive suddenly went out. The sky was ablaze with a blinding light; the earth fell about Mickey and his ear drums seemed to split in two as the world blasted apart.

His horse stopped with a suddenness that made him think the animal had blindly driven into a stone wall. It staggered back as though it had been struck by a giant hand. It rose on its

hind legs a brief second, and tried desperately to maintain an equilibrium it no longer possessed. Its head wavered frantically from side to side. It was blown back on its two hind legs, throwing Mickey clear as both were blown up the hill they were descending a moment ago, in defiance of all natural physical laws.

Over and over they rolled as the first explosion was followed by others; many others.

Dirt and grass and the shattered bodies of German trainmen mingled with the peaks of the hills near the blast as they were blown off their centuries old Caucasian bases. But Mickey did not see that. He felt it. He felt the earth suddenly drop away. He seemed suspended in the atmosphere. He saw the stars. Millions of them. Then he saw the overcast that was aflame with the fire on earth and he knew there could be no stars. Then came—utter darkness.

But the attack of unconsciousness was brief. The rumblings of more and smaller explosions vibrated through him as he lay on the soft earth and these had the effect on him that an alarm clock bell might have on a sleeper.

As he came to, he saw his horse struggling to rise. Someone was standing near it. He saw a hand stretch out and touch the animal in the middle of its forehead. There was a flash of fire; and the animal lay perfectly still.

FEODOR came up after seeing to it that the stricken animal would no longer suffer.

"Are you hurt?" he asked anxiously.

"No," replied Mickey pressing himself all over. "Just dazed."

"You're a very lucky man, Comrade," said Feodor.

"I'd forgotten about the impending explosions," said Mickey.

"That was because you thought more

of the safety of one of our men, than of your own," said the young guerrilla leader. "We shall remember that." He took Mickey by the arm. "I think you will have to get up behind me. I just had to shoot your horse. His forelegs—both of them—were broken."

Mickey lowered his head. "I'm sorry, Feodor," he said. "Guess we have to think before we act."

"We haven't always time," Feodor Koslovitch qualified for Mickey's impetuosity. "Come," he said with another one of his characteristic sweeps of the hand.

"Don't you want to see what happened to Pavlovitch?" asked Mickey anxiously.

"I don't think we need to," Feodor reminded him. "If you were knocked off your horse and your horse's legs broken four miles from the blast, you can imagine what must have happened to poor Pavlovitch who was a lot closer to it."

"Yes," said Mickey thoughtfully.

One hour later the nineteen men halted on the crest of a high hill and looked back to where the sky was still alight with the flames still consuming the ammunition train the Nazis would have no further need for.

Less than a half hour later, the small band of Russian guerrillas trailed into the stable cave, stalled and covered their horses, and returned to their quarters in the main cave, still wondering what had happened to Pavlovitch.

The night had gone well but for that one thing. The destruction of the ammunition train would delay the Nazi time table in the insane drive toward the Grozny oil fields.

The men lay on the beds of straw and looked up at the dirt ceiling above them. They didn't know why but they could not sleep. Mickey had rested his daze off and was about to drop off

when there was a slow, plodding noise outside the cave. This was followed by a shout from the sentry outside.

"*Doktarah!*" he cried in Russian. "*Doktarah Tchekov!*" "Pavlovitch comes! Pavlovitch comes!"

Mickey sat up on his bed on the floor. A candle was lit hurriedly. Other candles were lighted. Their yellow flickering lights cast weird shadow shapes on the walls of the cave as the still awake men jumped to their feet. The light fell upon a strange pair. Pavlovitch, the guerrilla hung to the mane of his horse which, though wounded seriously itself, had brought him safely back to the cave.

AS they stood in the doorway, a forlorn, desolate looking pair, they made a picture of utter despair and hopelessness. Mickey was the first to reach Pavlovitch's side. The man was unconscious from loss of blood.

"Start a fire," shouted Mickey. "I'll need some hot water."

Pavlovitch was removed to a long table in the rear of the cave. Mickey went to work on him. Examining him, he found the man's body was filled with shrapnel.

Mickey gave the wounded man an injection of adrenalin, for his heart beats had slowed from loss of blood. An immediate operation was necessary; he would need help; help in addition to that he would receive from the woman. Feodor would help. The lad had had First Aid Training.

Mickey went to work on Pavlovitch with Feodor's and the woman's help. He removed most of the shrapnel; all but one piece in the region of the man's heart. He did not dare touch that just then. The operation was performed by the light of many candles.

Pavlovitch regained consciousness two hours later. Dawn was breaking into the underground haven and gently

lit up the front part of the cave.

He moved as the tired Mickey turned to him.

"Hello, Pavlovitch?" said Mickey.

Pavlovitch turned his dazed eyes toward the American.

"How do you feel?" asked Mickey.

A faint smile crept over the man's face as he recognized the guerrilla doctor. Slowly, painfully he spoke.

"*Kakvashke Zdarovyyeh?*" he asked weakly in Russian repeating Mickey's question a little dully. "How are you."

FEODOR was standing by the man's bed. Neither he nor Mickey had slept that night.

"What happened?" asked Feodor of Pavlovitch.

"I wouldn't tax him too much, Feodor," warned Mickey. "At least, not just yet."

"We must know," insisted Feodor seriously. "I feel extremely uncomfortable about the whole business. Pavlovitch may know something."

"I—do," said the man slowly. Painfully he turned his head to Feodor. "I'm—sorry—this—happened, Comrade Koslovitch," he said. "I—ran—after you. I slipped and fell back down the hill to the tracks." He paused for breath. After a moment's rest, he continued: "I—tried—to walk. My—ankle—was broken. When—I—managed to crawl—to the top—of the hill—you—were gone. My horse was at the foot of the hill—on—the other side. I was just about to crawl down when the explosion came."

Pavlovitch had to pause again.

"Take your time Pavlovitch," said Mickey gently.

The wounded man smiled gratefully at Mickey. "I have—not time," he said prophetically.

"Nonsense," encouraged the American. "You'll outlive us."

"No," said Pavlovitch. "No. I

know." He turned to Feodor. "I don't know how—I got—on my horse. Maybe—I think—my horse was blown down too. I—think—I—got on him while he was still on—the ground. When it was all over—we headed for—home." He smiled weakly at the thought of home. "Home," he murmured, as though it were a sacred word. He went on: "We were getting—along—all right—until we met Nazi guerrillas. They shot at us—at me. I heard their leader—tell the men—not to kill the horses. He didn't care what—they did—to me. They called him—Captain Von Starheim."

"Von Starheim!" gasped Mickey. Turning to Feodor he shouted: "Do you know what this means? It means that Von Starheim had followed that horse here . . ."

But Feodor was not listening to Mickey. He was listening to machine gun fire outside the cave. Mickey realized what was happening. Von Starheim and his gang of Nazi killers had found the hideout of the Russian guerrillas and they were attacking it.

"To arms! To arms!" shouted Feodor. But he could have saved his breath. His men were already blasting at the Nazi invaders and machine gun fire raked the pass from both ends.

Hand grenades blasted at the mouth of the cave.

Mickey drew deeper inside. Then he saw the hundred boxes of dynamite. One little stray bullet, and the mountain in which the cave lay, would blow apart.

Outnumbered four to one, the Russians had little hope of destroying this band in open combat. There was a small passage in one side of the cave which led to the other underground hideout in which the horses were kept. There was just room enough for a man to stand up stoopshouldered.

"Help me get the wounded into the

other cave, Tanya," he said.

THOSE wounded who could walk struggled through the passage. The others were carried on stretchers to the stables, tied to the back of some of the horses, and led out of another passage into the daylight at the rear of the mountain. He urged them to make their getaway.

"Come with us," they insisted.

"No," said Mickey. "My place is here with Feodor Koslovitch. You people cannot help us. Go down to the valley behind Pyatigorsk. Friendly hands will take care of you all there."

"What about Pavlovitch?" the woman asked.

"He's dead," said Mickey. "Get going," he ordered.

The woman mounted one of the horses and Mickey handed up her youngster. They whipped up the horses and disappeared into other passes which led them in a roundabout way toward the Valley behind Pyatigorsk.

Mickey returned to the stable. About twenty of the guerrillas were mounting their horses for their getaway.

"Where are you going," he asked of the mounted men.

"Koslovitch ordered us to evacuate while we still can," one of the men replied. "We cannot win. We are outnumbered four to one. He is wounded: the others remaining with him are wounded and cannot escape. But you—Come with us, Comrade."

"No, thank you," replied Mickey. "My place is here. I have no orders yet to evacuate. But you go while you can. Take the back pass. Follow your wounded comrades and protect them."

Mickey picked up two submachine guns lying on the stable floor. Those men were not running out, Mickey knew. If Feodor had insisted they save themselves while they could, the plight of the little guerrilla band must be

hopeless. At least, he could get a shot or two in before they were all finished off; one good shot and that one in the rotten carcass that was Von Starheim.

The American doctor slouched through the passage that connected the stable cave to the cave used by the Russian guerrillas as quarters. As he neared the passage, he observed a sudden quiet. The deadly fire had ceased. The two machine guns he held in his hands were knocked out of his grasp as he emerged into the larger cave. A flashlight was thrown in his face and momentarily blinded him as he emerged from the dark of the subterranean passageway. When he could see clearly—he saw that he faced the grim, dark barrel of a Leuger pistol. And it was held in the hand of the Nazi Oberst—Von Starheim.

VI

"HOW nice, Doctor Tchekov," smirked Von Starheim. "Fancy meeting you here."

"Not very original, are you Von Starheim," smiled Mickey. "I think I said that once before somewhere."

"I don't think I'll have any occasion to use the phrase to you in the future, Doctor Tchekov," scowled the Oberst. "For you—like your band of Russian guerrillas—there is no future."

"What have you done with the boy, Feodor Koslovitch?" asked Mickey hurriedly fearing the worst.

"Shot him," replied Von Starheim. "As he deserved for blowing up that ammunition train—he and his band—last night and with it five hundred of Germany's finest infantrymen."

"I can see where the ammunition would be a loss," smiled Mickey with satisfaction at hearing that five hundred Nazi smudge pots went up in smoke with the ammunition. "But as for the men," he added, "they can mean

nothing to your inferior Fuhrer judging by the number he keeps sending into the muzzles of the Russian guns to be slaughtered like diseased cattle."

"Silence!" shouted Von Starheim in a fury. "You will not long live to see much more of that Russian luck." With a wave of the Leuger in the direction of the mouth of the cave he motioned Mickey to get outside. As he started for the entrance, two or three shots outside made him halt. He turned to Von Starheim, enquiringly.

The man smiled fiendishly. "The Coup de Grace," he explained guessing what was on Mickey's mind. "We don't like to leave wounded Russians to suffer unnecessarily"—his eyes narrowed, his lips curled significantly as he added—"we don't take prisoners."

"Knowing you as well as I do, Von Starheim," said Mickey biting, "I can understand that."

"That applies to you too," added the Nazi smiling.

"I didn't think I would be immune from your Nazi form of civilization," retorted the American. "I wasn't fooling myself for a single moment."

"I'm glad to hear that," said Von Starheim, "because I have saved you for myself. But first, I want you to witness a small ceremony."

They emerged into the light of the pass. As Mickey looked about him for the body of young Feodor, his eyes fell upon eight of his guerrilla comrades lined up in front of the wall of the pass. Their hands were tied behind their backs; their machine guns lay at their feet temptingly, but they could not reach for them even if they were not tied for they were faced with a row of Nazi submachine guns in the hands of Von Starheim's men.

Mickey's eyes widened. He was about to turn to Von Starheim when he heard the man cry in German: "Take aim!"

"Von Starheim!" Mickey cried. "You can't do that! You can't kill men in cold blood like that! It's murder!"

Von Starheim merely laughed. "*Blahadaryoo, Doktorah!*" cried the doomed Russians to Mickey. "*Pra-schakeeteh!*" They were thanking Mickey for all he had done for them and their stricken comrades; and they said goodbye.

MICKEY'S eyes filled as he smiled and waved a trembling hand at the brave men who waited for death. They smiled back at him grateful that there was one friend to see them make the last great sacrifice.

"Fire!" cried the Nazi Captain Von Starheim. The German machine guns raked the bodies of the Russians until the weight of the lead, added to the loss of life that made it possible for them to stand so courageously up to the Germans, brought them down and they fell across the guns with which they had laid so many of the Huns so low.

When the smoke from the guns cleared in the draft of the pass, Mickey saw the inert body of young Feodor lying about twenty feet above the opening to the cave. He turned to Von Starheim: "These people were my friends," he began. "I don't expect you to do favors for me; but like your own men, they still were soldiers and deserve, if not a soldier's burial, then a spot where the carrion birds won't thrive on the men who gave their lives to defend their homes and their land. Will you let me put their bodies inside the cave?"

Von Starheim grinned: "The indomitable Tchekov asks me for a favor," he said. He shrugged his shoulders. "Well, why not. We were classmates in Breslau. And this is a last request. Make it snappy and don't keep me waiting too long."

Mickey did not stop to thank his

enemy. He stepped across the still bodies of his friends to where young Feodor lay. He stooped down and picked the boy up in his arms; gently he carried him inside the cave.

With his handkerchief, Mickey wiped the blood from the boy's face. With a torn sheet taken from the bed on which he used to sleep, he covered the silent body as a tear fell from his cheek and baptized the little hero.

One by one Mickey brought the fallen Russians into the cave. Von Starheim accompanied him on several of his trips to see that he did nothing other than that which he had requested permission to do. The other Nazis climbed up the side of the hill in which the cave lay and threw themselves down to wait for Mickey to finish.

Mickey took another man into the cave and as with the others, laid him on the bed he occupied in life. This man he carefully carried to one of the beds near the piled-up boxes of dynamite. Von Starheim, satisfied that Mickey was resigned to his fate, and that he would not attempt to escape, did not follow him into the cave. This was what Mickey wanted. As he laid the dead man on his bed near a box of time bombs, the Yankee guerrilla doctor grabbed one, set the fuse for five minutes, placed it in a box of dynamite the cover of which had been ripped open before, and stepped hurriedly out of the cave.

THERE was one more man left to put in his bed. This took Mickey another minute for he laid the man on some straw near the cave opening.

Quite calmly Mickey stepped over to the waiting Von Starheim who smiled at him as he approached.

"I'm ready Von Starheim," Mickey said. "Let's get it over with. Call your men."

Mickey waited for Von Starheim to

call his men.

"Oh, please don't be silly, doctor," said the man sarcastically. "That is my privilege. That is an honor I have looked forward to for many years. I want the pleasure of killing you myself—and alone. Only I shall enjoy your great death scene. I have earned it with patient waiting. It can mean nothing to the others."

"Very well," said Mickey. "You have your Leuger ready. Why don't you use it."

"Not here," said the man. "But down there." He indicated a cluster of trees below in the valley about a thousand feet from the cave.

Mickey glanced slyly at his watch. There were still three minutes to go before hell would break loose under unsuspecting Heinies on the hill. Mickey smiled inwardly as he hurried down the hill toward the valley.

"You seem in a hurry," noted Von Starheim.

"I don't like prolonging anything good or bad," Mickey replied. He turned back to Von Starheim who was following close on his heels. "Don't shoot me in the back, will you Von Starheim."

"What!" replied the Nazi, "and lose the satisfaction of seeing the expression on your face when my bullets tear through you. Of course not! That would be foolish."

Two minutes to go.

Mickey kept talking. "It's a beautiful day for a murder, isn't it rat?" he asked.

"What do you Americans say about sticks and stones?" asked Von Starheim sarcastically.

"You'd be surprised," said Mickey.

They reached the cluster of trees Von Starheim had ordered Mickey to.

"Where do you want me to stand, you Nazi bootlicking killer?" asked Mickey. He knew the man couldn't

take much of that.

One minute to go before the blast.

THE taunt didn't seem to move Von Starheim. He seemed so intent on the sadistic enjoyment that awaited him when he would behold his Leuger steel lay low the American he hated most in the world. He ordered Mickey farther into the cluster of trees.

Thirty seconds to go.

"I wonder what all your schoolmates at Breslau University would think if they could see the disgraced and yellow classmate of theirs, Captain Von Starheim of Hitler's Heinie Rats about to murder a man in cold blood," asked Mickey.

"*Donnerwetter!*" cried the man as Mickey touched off the spark that made the Nazi storm. "This is it!" he screamed. Being reminded of his expulsion was more than even he could take under the circumstances. He raised the Leuger muzzle to the line of Mickey's heart. He could see the cold perspiration gather on the American's forehead as he waited to receive the hot steel.

"This is it!" screamed the Nazi again. And as he was about to press the trigger, it was as though he himself had given the signal. Fire flashed from the muzzle of the Leuger. But the detonating sound did not seem to come from the pistol but from the hill above.

The whole earth seemed to rise under their feet; a huge rent in the soil opened up a few feet away, as the sky suddenly blackened above them. The blackness was streaked with an orange flame. As the explosion reverberated through the valley, both men were lifted clear off their feet and thrown about twenty yards by the concussion.

Von Starheim's bullet went wide. His gun flew out of his hand and drove for a cluster of brush where it disappeared. There were only two great blasts, but

the concussion left both Von Starheim and Mickey limp for almost fifteen minutes.

When they both came out of the daze, they glanced off to the mountain and saw most of it blown away. The dirt and laughing Heinies that were blown skyward together, now lay quietly in each others bosoms.

Von Starheim and Mickey were not immune to the falling debris. They were covered with it and had to dig themselves out. The German looked for his gun but it was nowhere in sight.

Mickey was the first to speak.

"Looks like fists again, rat," he said.

Von Starheim was pale from the blast; the threat of a physical beating made him take on a jaundiced appearance; his face turned yellow. His eyes took on a frightened expression.

"No," he murmured. "No. You can't do that to me." He recalled other beatings administered by Mickey at Breslau. "You can't do that to me," he repeated.

Mickey rose to his feet. He painfully strode over to where Von Starheim was still sitting on the ground. The man tried to crawl back and away from the disaster he knew was about to befall him.

"Get up you filthy swine," he gritted. "You're a brave man facing an unarmed man with a gun in your hand. You're a brave man when you're with other dogs like you who you order to shoot men with their hands tied behind their backs. Get up! I'm going to polish you off and this time do a better job of it than I ever did at Breslau."

HE reached down and lifted the Nazi to his feet; then, in his best pile-driver fashion, sent his big fist crashing into the man's mouth driving the Nazi's front teeth down the back of his throat.

Mickey followed this by a left to the

man's nose. He felt the bone crush under the impact and the wine flowed as it had never flowed in any wine cellar in Germany. The murderous Nazi face was crimson; the mouth that gaped black with a huge toothless cavity, screamed for mercy.

"What mercy did you give those Russians," asked Mickey now in a red fury himself.

"Help! Help!" cried Von Starheim as Mickey pounded on the man's chest and ribs until they cracked under the trip-hammer blows.

"Don't call for help," cried Mickey. "God himself wouldn't listen to you—and right now there isn't anyone else who could hear you."

He continued to beat the man into insensibility. But before the Nazi passed out, Mickey, hysterical himself now, screamed at him in a frenzy: "I set off that explosion, you dog! I blew your Nazi band to pieces! I did it!"

He felt the German collapse under him as he shook the life out of the man to impress him with the fact that it was Mickey who destroyed his band of killers. He let him go and the man fell unconscious to the dirt covered grass.

Mickey himself dropped to the ground, exhausted; weeping bitterly with anger, and at the loss of his young friend Feodor.

There was nothing weak in his tears. No stronger man could have helped cracking under the gigantic strain. Mickey Tchekov, was an ordinary human, like any other ordinary human with an average human's courage.

Calmed, his strength recovered, three hours later he walking into the camp of the escaped guerrillas carrying the badly mashed Von Starheim over his strong young shoulder. He dumped the man to the ground and turned him over to his comrades.

"There he is," he said. "This is what is left of Von Starheim."

"Why didn't you kill him?" asked one of the men.

"No," replied Mickey. "I'm a doctor. I'm supposed to save lives; not destroy them. That's your job."

"But Feodor was your friend," reminded one of the men significantly.

"He was your leader," recalled Mickey.

"He is right," said another of the Russian guerrillas, a giant of a Cossack. "The doctor is right." He leaned down and lifted the now whimpering Von Starheim as though the one hundred and sixty pound German were just a child. He swung him over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes, and headed for the rear of the barn on the farm where the guerrillas had found haven. Other of the men followed him.

MICKEY walked off toward a small scrub pine, that grew in front of a taller growth of pine trees. It was so symbolic of young Feodor and his guerrilla band of men, that Mickey felt it was a silent memorial to the boy and his faithful followers.

His hand carressed the pine needles and stopped suddenly as a number of shots rang out on the otherwise quiet air about the farm. There was no expression of joy on his face at the sound. He knew it was all over with his old enemy; but he knew too, that it was all over with his young friend.

"It won't be—it isn't over," he murmured. "I'll always remember that kid as I knew him—not as I left him. He was brave, unselfish, and fine. I'm proud to have served under him—even if he was years younger than I. Boy though he was; he was every inch a man. I hope, when I go, my friends will be able to say as much for me."

Mickey Tchekov gave the little pine a gentle, affectionate pat—and turned back to the farmhouse where the men had gathered.

IF BOMBERS DON'T DO IT,



The Rangers made short, murderous work

THIRTY men fought their way through the green hell of New Guinea swampland. They had been traveling hard for two days, pushing deeper into the Jap-infested jungle northwest of Kokoda. Now they were forcing passage through a narrow slot of muck and mire, plunging knee-high into the greenish scum coating the sur-

face, cursing and sweating and gouging every inch of the way. On either side of their malarial coffin, jagged slopes challenged them.

It was a nice place for ambush. Jap machine guns pouring lead from those heights could have made a murderous slaughter of this handpicked patrol of death.

GREAT NOVEL OF A HAND-PICKED DEATH PATROL—THIRTY HARDBITTEN

BAYONETS WILL!

by **DAVID BRANDT**
Author of "The Yank Commandos Are Coming!" etc.



with their guns on those dirty Japs!

It was a heavy-odds gamble, this hand-to-hand fighting job MacArthur had sent a scant few hardbitten U. S. Rangers to do—thirty battle-toughened Yanks behind thirty bloody bayonets, pitted against hundreds of those dirty back-stabbing Jap devils pouring machine-gun lead from every fox-hole and trench and ambush!

It was a heavy odds gamble—this job MacArthur had sent a handful of hard bitten Rangers out to do. Thirty against hundreds of the little yellow

devils who had gouged themselves strong entrenchments in the fierce region perilously close to Port Moresby. Yet each man of this raider patrol

U. S. RANGERS BEHIND THIRTY DEADLY BAYONETS!

was a skinful of death—tried veterans, deadily with gun, knife, or fists. They had helped tear loose the Jap stranglehold on Australia in the Solomons. Each had been tattooed with the ugly scars of experience.

MacArthur had brought these men back from the Solomons for a special job — to disrupt Japanese overland supply routes to Kokoda and the surrounding territory reaching out for Port Moresby before the combined allied strength of air, naval, and land forces made the supreme bid to knock the enemy out of New Guinea entirely.

MacArthur knew what he was doing—pitting thirty against hundreds! Perhaps he had reread early American History for the inspiration that had sent this desperate band into the teeth of hell.

A fiery little patriot with a game leg and a handful of half starved patriots had written blood-red history in the swamps of Georgia back in a dark Revolution that brought freedom to thirteen struggling colonies. His name was Francis Marion.

They had called him The Swamp Fox!

MacArthur had no Marion to send into the jungles of New Guinea . . .

THERE had been a grinning devil—six feet tall, with a touch of murder twisted into powerful fingers. His name was Francis Kelly. He lost his corporal's stripes and first name after Tulagi.

It had been very simple, according to news print.

The marines had established beachheads and consolidated inland positions. MacArthur had sent along a battalion of Rangers to help out.

Francis Kelly went along.

His motor barge had been sunk by artillery fire just inside the treacherous strip of channel guarding Tulagi. He

had made the quarter mile swim to shore together with half a dozen survivors from the barge.

The dead had left plenty of guns and ammunition!

Armed with hand grenades and tommy guns, Francis Kelly and his companions struck out into the jungle. The ex-corporal helped make living history in four hellish days. His little band had been cut down to three, including himself.

Yet they had destroyed six Jap machine gun nests harrying the invaders and had flushed several important coveys of stubborn little devils who did not know the meaning of death.

Wounded in the right shoulder and arm, Francis Kelly climaxed his private war with the capture of three high ranking Japanese army officers who were attempting to escape the trap with eighteen men.

An AP man got the story from one of the Yank survivors of that battle royal. Francis Kelly couldn't remember much of what had happened because of the agony of his wounds which had driven him half out of his mind with pain.

The ex-corporal had merely wiped out seven of the Japs with his tommy gun before he ran out of ammunition. He had used his bare hands to literally beat the three high ranking officers into submission before the fight was over.

There had been no other prisoners.

Ex-corporal Francis Kelly received a medal — and an invitation to meet General MacArthur.

He was promoted to the rank of second lieutenant.

MacArthur had no Swamp Fox—but there was a grinning six foot devil by the name of Kelly . . . TIGER Kelly.

The AP man who had wired the story back home had had an inspiration.

Anything could happen—out there northwest of Kokoda.

Plunging steadily through the swampy morass, Lieutenant Tiger Kelly, half twisted his head back to the single file of men behind him. His long legs sucked noisily as they pulled free of the greenish muck and took him onto a patch of solid ground.

He paused and slapped angrily at an insect buzzing around his ear. The men looked tired, he noticed, but they voiced no complaint as they sloughed through the last few yards of swamp and joined him on the higher ground.

"Well, Nelson, we're out of that," he said cheerfully to the bull necked, mud smeared figure next to him.

Grappler Nelson grunted, "I ain't gonna like this, Lootenant." He gave a vicious twist to the holstered .45 Colt automatic digging into his groin. His arms, tapered baseball bats that had helped earn him the title "Killer" in professional wrestling circles, flailed wildly trying to drive away a swarm of insects that had attacked him.

Tiger spread his now-famous grin over his broad, sunbaked features.

HE HAD not been bothered by Grappler's remark. That squat figure had earned himself a little bronze twist of medal at Guadalcanal in the fourth attempt by the Japs to land troops. There had been a light artillery piece dragged ashore at one point. It had been giving the defenders a little trouble. The one time mat artist had been the lone survivor of nine Rangers that had silenced the gun.

"Where do we go from here, Lieutenant?" one of the men asked, glancing skeptically at the sloping heights on either side of them.

Tiger indicated the left slope with a sweep of his hand. It rose to a height of several hundred feet and blunted off abruptly into a maze of heavy undergrowth.

"Lae is northeast from here," he

said. "Once we hit the top of that ridge, we should find the main Jap supply route somewhere ahead." He smiled grimly. "We ought to discourage such things."

The haggard faces of the men broadened into wide grins.

Tiger suddenly froze where he was. A flight of birds had appeared over the top of the ridge, winging wildly to the south. They suddenly veered off to the left and kept going.

Instinctively Tiger loosened the strap bracing his tommy gun against his shoulder and slipped it free. With an expert flick, he slid the safety catch free.

The birds had disappeared from sight.

Tiger's experience with wild life in eighteen months on a mining job in Alaska had taught him to respect warnings by the feathered folk. Something alien to their surroundings had flushed them.

The Rangers needed no orders.

To a man they stripped for action. Guns were loosened from shoulder straps. Whatever it was up there over the ridge—they were going to find out—and soon.

"Nelson!" Tiger snapped.

Grappler grinned. "Waitin' for orders, Lootenant."

"Take charge," Tiger said. "We're going up the ridge. You'll follow with the men fifty yards behind."

"And where are you gonna be?" Grappler said bluntly.

"Something scared those birds," Tiger replied. "I aim to find out the reason." He glanced over the men. "Pulaski!" he called softly.

A thin wiry figure pushed eagerly through the knot of men. His dark features were tight against the narrow slope of his prominent cheek bones. And a livid scar three inches long, stretching the length of his right jaw,

throbbed redly with excitement. It was the only sign of emotion he showed.

A lead tipped whip had left that souvenir after the fall of Warsaw. Eighteen months had not helped him forget it.

"I'm ready, sir," Pulaski said quietly. His eyes gleamed for a moment. His fingers showed veiny white knuckles gripping the stock of his tommy gun.

"Give your pack to one of the men," Tiger said.

He slipped his own from his broad football shoulders and handed it to Grappler.

He noticed Pulaski waiting quietly. The man was without nerves. He had been with Corporal Francis Kelly at Tulagi. His deadly sharpshooting while under steady fire from the first machine gun nest they had wiped out had accounted for four of the crew.

Without another word, Tiger turned and threaded into the underbrush towards the base of the objective ridge. His heavy service shoes made little noise now as he carefully picked his trail. Pulaski followed a few yards behind.

A half frozen trapper Tiger had taken in while on the Alaskan mining job had shown him how to stalk big game.

His sharp eyes picked out the thin spots in the brush. He avoided crashing through where he could get on his hands and knees and snake forward. Pulaski followed his example.

THEY were starting up the ridge in a few minutes. Both men were scratched and bleeding from tiny cuts in a dozen places from contact with sharp stones and cruel, stinging branches.

Tiger's newly healed shoulder ached from the strain, but he uttered no sound of complaint. His tommy gun, slung over his shoulder again, caught in a

protruding branch from an overhung tree. He slipped free and continued patiently on up the steep trail he had found.

Once he glanced back to see if Pulaski was following. The little Pole was close enough to touch his heels. He had taken to jungle warfare with inborn instinct.

Halfway up the ridge, Tiger paused to listen for any sounds betraying alien movement. There were none. Yet he felt uneasy. He was playing his hunch on the unusual action of the flight of birds.

He came to an open patch in the climb and looked down. Nelson and the others were out of sight. But he could hear a faint crackling. They had probably struck the heavy blanket of scrub he and Pulaski had wormed their way through.

It was a hot, slow fight to reach the summit of the ridge. Tiger panted and scrambled his way into the clear an hour and a half later. His khaki o.d.'s were ripped in several places, and a flap of shoulder cloth hung loose where he had twisted through a maze of lianas.

Cautiously he got to his feet, unslinging his tommy gun at the same time. He heard Pulaski breathing heavily just behind him. Then a finger nudged him gently in the ribs.

Tiger half turned. The little Pole was pointing to a shadow of jungle to their left falling away from the rise of ground on which they stood.

There was a quick glint as the sun struck something bright and shiny. Then it was gone.

Tiger nodded.

His pulse started to hammer. And he got an empty feeling inside; a natural reaction that warned him when hell was about to pop.

That momentary glint had been caused by the sun striking a gun barrel.

Tiger's hunch had been right!

Without a word, he plunged into the jungle depths that swallowed the terrain from where they had been standing. It took twenty minutes to reach the approximate spot where that flash of brightness had been seen.

It was the longest twenty minutes Tiger had ever spent. His leather-tanned features were glistening with perspiration. Every muscle and bone in his body ached from worming through that green carpet of hell. Once something long, brown and wriggling, shot across his path. Tiger caught a glimpse of beady black eyes and a large ugly spotted head. Iron will power kept him steady as five feet of wrist-thick poisonous reptile wriggled out of sight.

Then suddenly — the dense jungle screen fell away. Ahead in a camouflaged clearing was set an anti-aircraft gun emplacement. Five little yellow men in grimy jungle-blended uniforms were squatting around the emplacement gulping down a midday meal.

Watching from his screen of concealment, Tiger could feel his fingers gripping tighter around the tommy gun pushed forward before him. A quick burst—and five dead Japs would return to the burial grounds of the Rising Sun.

TIGER stifled the impulse. That A-A battery hadn't wandered into this hellforsaken patch of jungle by itself. It took roads and men to place it there.

Information supplied by G-2 hadn't been so far off after all. Tiger had stumbled onto one of the overland supply routes.

Carefully, he backed out of his forward position and inched along the ground. His left foot struck a mass of rotting leaves. There was a slight noise. Tiger froze.

He could hear a jabber of Oriental

tongue. After a minute he twisted his head around to where Pulaski was lying motionless. Lifting a hand, he gestured to the rear.

The jabber of Japanese tongues was softer now. He could still hear the singsong whine, however. He grinned. They were in for a surprise—and soon.

Once they were out of earshot, Tiger turned to Pulaski. "Go back and bring up the men," he commanded softly. "I'll wait here—just in case."

The Pole nodded.

He wriggled into the heavy foliage out of sight. He was gone for half an hour.

Tiger began to get uneasy. It was easy to get lost in the jungle. Then a patch of khaki pushed into the open a few yards from where he was lying. Thin shoulders followed.

Pulaski was back.

In a few minutes, Tiger's entire band was gathered at the spot. Grappler Nelson, his features red with flush of that terrible climb, snaked over to Tiger.

"Just give the word, Lieutenant," he begged in a throaty whisper. He patted the stock of his tommy gun lovingly.

Tiger shook his head.

"We'll wait for darkness," he said, and glanced up at the baking sun, high in the heavens. "Then—we'll attack!" he finished.

Grappler looked disappointed.

The men were sprawled flat on the ground trying to relax and keep cool at the same time. The sun found them through the trees and roasted their drenched bodies unmercifully.

It was a long afternoon. Tiger smothered his itching desire several times to wipe out that Jap gun and crew less than two hundred yards away.

For a moment, he half wished he had stayed back there at Tulagi. With two stripes on his sleeve, it had been easy to take chances. The responsi-

bility for the lives of thirty men and the success of this venture rested heavily on his big shoulders. Those gold bars carried a heavy price with them.

In late afternoon, he suddenly made up his mind. Removing all excess equipment except his compass and webbed belt supporting his .45 automatic, he slipped quietly away from the others.

Alone—he pushed rapidly through the jungle, taking his bearings by compass so he could find the hidden rendezvous again. He skirted the Jap gun and drove on ahead. In half an hour he found what he had been looking for. A wide trail had been hacked through the jungle. It bore the marks of tire treads sunk into the swampy earth, and showed signs of being well used.

This, then, had been one of the vital factors that had marked the long period of inactivity after the rains once the Japs had taken Kokoda. The cunning devils had planned their strategy well. With established jungle supply routes to reinforce the outpost troops, their foothold at Kokoda would be a tough job to dislodge.

A SUDDEN familiar sound sent Tiger ducking back under cover. The sound of a truck motor! He listened tensely as the cough and sputter of the motor grew louder. Then bumping and lurching around a sharp bend in the jungle trail, a small truck crashed into sight.

There were two Japs in the front seat of the half ton vehicle. The man next to the driver held a submachine gun, resting across his knees.

Watched by unseen eyes, the truck bounced past Tiger's place of concealment and pounded on up the trail out of sight.

Tiger grinned.

There would be little traffic along that jungle pike for some time to come—very shortly!

There were no other trucks following, so Tiger crept back to where his men were waiting. He used compass bearings to reach the spot. Darkness was just setting in when he wriggled through the last maze of brush into the semi-clearing.

He had a moment of quick heart fluttering as he got to his feet. Five tommy guns were pointed at his midriff. They lowered almost immediately.

"You shoulda warned us, Lootenant," Grappler apologized. "We thought mebbe at first you was one of those slinky devils pulling a surprise attack."

Tiger gulped a mouthful of warm water from his canteen. Then he explained what he had found, and laid the plans for attack.

"No shooting unless it's absolutely necessary," he warned. "The Japs probably have guns set up all along the road." And added, "We'll take 'em as we find 'em."

They waited until the sultry darkness closed in around them. There was a full moon, and its light broke the shadows sufficiently for them to set the trap.

Tiger took ten men to destroy the Jap gun. The others he sent out to deploy along the supply route in case an enemy night movement should barge in and upset the timetable of destruction. Pulaski and Grappler were among those selected to take the gun.

A big sergeant who had been taken from an outfit of engineers was placed in charge of the main force of Ranges. He had helped with the preparations of the ambush into which the Japs had walked in their first invasion attempt at Milne Bay.

Two men were left behind to guard the excess equipment, precious food supplies, and extra ammunition.

Tiger led his small group towards the gun emplacement. They crawled on their stomachs at three foot inter-

vals, pushing their guns in front of them and then wriggling up to them. The jungle was softly quiet with its occasional wild life noises to break the silence.

Foot by foot, the Rangers stole upon the unsuspecting Japs. Cunard, the former sergeant of engineers, and his men were already cutting in a wide arc towards the supply road well below the anti-aircraft gun.

Tiger reached the edge of the camouflaged clearing first. He lifted his head. The moon threw soft shadows on the huddled forms of three sleeping Japs. His forehead creased in a worried frown. Four more figures were gathered around the gun itself.

There had been only five Japs on guard that morning. Then Tiger saw something else. To the left of the gun, well screened by foliage from aerial observation, was a truck.

That accounted for the additional Japs on guard! The truck he had spotted on the crude road had been bound for the hidden battery.

WRIGGLING back out of sight, he whispered terse orders into Grappler's ear. They were relayed back to the others. The raiding party split. Five of the Rangers cut to the right to attack from that flank. Tiger led the others in a slight curve away from frontal attack. They would pounce upon the enemy through the screen of trees protecting their left flank.

Inching forward was slow, hot work. And the incessant annoyance from swarms of insects that plagued them was almost unbearable. It took Tiger three quarters of an hour to maneuver around close enough to the enemy camp for the last swift dash into their midst.

Several times he dropped flat with his face buried in the damp ground, hardly daring to breathe. The four Japs on guard appeared restless. One

of them walked into the clearing less than twenty-five feet from where the ex-corporal and his men lay. Reassured, after a moment, he went back to the others. The crisis was at hand.

Then at last Tiger moved into position to strike out. Grappler and his men were fanned out sufficiently to converge upon the enemy without loss of time or precious yardage.

Tiger signalled for the alert. He glanced at the luminous dial of his army wrist watch and allowed three minutes to tick by. The Rangers flanking the right had plenty of time now to move into position.

Tiger eyed the three sleeping forms less than ten feet away. Then his eyes darted to the four men at the gun. Two of them were squatting on the ground by the carriage. The other two were standing erect scanning the heavens for sign of Allied night raiders.

Tiger took a deep breath.

This was it!

The attack was a complete surprise. Three of the Rangers made short murderous work with the stocks of their tommy guns on the trio of sleeping Japs. Tiger sprang into the open with Grappler and other Rangers and advanced the few feet separating them from the Jap gun. At the same instant, five lunging forms burst from behind the truck on the other side.

The Japs were too stunned to scream out an alarm. Tiger went for one of the Nips standing at the gun. Two mighty steps brought him within arm's length. As the little yellow man whirled to meet the attack, Tiger swung his tommy gun like a baseball bat, his fingers intertwined around the barrel. There was a sickening splat! The Jap's head split and crushed into pulp. Grappler got his hand over the mouth of one of the Japs squatting—just in time as the man started to scream out.

Grappler stifled a yelp of pain as

sharp teeth bit into his little finger and sank deep into the flesh to the bone. The former mat killer wrapped his free arm around the hundred and thirty pound frame of his victim and with a quick jerk, using the tremendous power in his arms and shoulders, snapped the spinal column like a matchstick. The body went limp. Grappler let it drop. He felt the flesh of his little finger rip with maddening pain as he pulled away from those sharp teeth.

The surviving men from Nippon had been well taken care of. The avalanche of revenge-thirsty Rangers on the right flank had all but smothered their efforts to strike back.

The ambush had been swift and merciless!

There was no time for squeamishness. Tiger counted seven dead Japs. Methodically, he wiped the blood off his gun stock, using a blanket thrown carelessly on the ground by the gun crew.

The moon threw grotesque shadows over the three Japs who still lay huddled where they had taken their last sleep.

"Bring the men in," Tiger instructed Grappler.

The others he detailed to remove the bodies of the Japs into the undergrowth just beyond the truck. Then he inspected his booty.

THERE were plenty of shells laid out near the gun. That, Tiger reasoned, was going to be perfect. They would come in handy—with the new daring plan he had suddenly devised.

The big prize of the raid, however, lay inside the truck. There were a dozen small land mines, a machine gun with ten thousand rounds of ammunition, and a sizable quantity of dried fish and rice. The truck, evidently, had been headed for a destination up ahead

and had stopped for the night at this outpost.

Tiger smiled grimly as he noticed that the fuel gauge checked full. The truck wasn't a bad job. It had been built similar to the half ton weapon carriers used by the U. S. armed forces. And the tires were special size with rubber tractor treads for use in this jungle country.

The bodies of the Japs had already been removed from sight when Tiger came out from his inspection of the truck.

Grappler, meanwhile, was walking boldly down the rough road. His tommy gun rocked jauntily under one arm. He was immensely pleased with the results of the raid. A piece of artillery and a truck wasn't bad for a starter.

He went several hundred yards down the road and stopped. Then softly he whistled the opening bars of Yankee Doodle and stopped. The shadows on either side of the supply pike remained ominously quiet. Grappler felt a prickling sensation run up and down his spine. He went another twenty-five yards and whistled again. This time a little louder.

There was a slight noise behind him. He whirled, snapping up the muzzle of his tommy gun. Then with a sigh of relief, he lowered it. Two grimy figures were standing there grinning at him.

"Damn it!" he burst out. "I wish you guys wouldn't do that. This place is creepy enough."

"We didn't hear any shooting," one of the men said. "We were playing it cozy."

"Cozy, hell!" Grappler snorted. He held up his right hand. The mangled little finger, doused liberally with iodine was wrapped in a handkerchief. "One of those yellow jerks tried to get a sample of Yankee hamburger."

Other silent figures were coming out

of concealment all along the road now.

"We got the gun," Grappler told them. "The lieutenant wants us back on the double."

Tiger had his next move all planned for execution when Grappler returned with the men.

"Jap supplies will be moving through here in the morning," he explained. "I don't think they'll be going very far."

The men grinned at that.

Tiger went on coolly, "I figure this trail is dotted with plenty of auxiliary bases from here to Lae. We've got to destroy them one by one. We've been lucky—so far. Now . . . here's what we've got to do. . . ."

Despite their near-exhaustion from the long trek into the mountains, the Rangers put Tiger's plan on a swift working basis. The anti-aircraft gun was rolled down into the trail and pushed back a hundred yards to where the pike cut sharply. It took ten men to force the gun up a short incline to a suitably flat place where it could be fixed to sweep the trail. Ammunition and other captured supplies were brought along. The truck was left up ahead.

TIGER had the machine gun set up on the opposite side of the trail. Then leaving four men to stand two hour watch with others picked for relief at the proper intervals, the main body of Rangers grabbed what sleep they could.

Dawn was filtering through the darkness when Grappler's heavy hand nudged Tiger.

"Five thirty-five, lieutenant," he whispered. "We're gonna have company soon. I heard a truck motor. Sounded like it was about a mile away."

Tiger sat up with a start. Sleep was dashed from his eyes.

"Why didn't you wake me up sooner?" he demanded.

Grappler gave him a toothy grin. "This ain't no speedway," he replied. "Besides, you looked kinda tuckered out."

Tiger listened a moment. Faintly he could hear the rumble of a motor. Then he relaxed. Sound carried plenty of distance out here. It would be a long while before they had visitors.

Tiger turned back to Grappler. He noticed the strained, tired look on the heavyset features. The man looked as if he had gotten little sleep. Tiger diagnosed the trouble quickly.

"Let me see that hand, Nelson," he said.

Grappler protested. "Aw, lieutenant, it ain't nothin'."

"That's an order, sergeant," Tiger said.

Grappler thrust the wounded hand into view. Tiger unwrapped the soiled handkerchief, inspected the mutilated little finger. It was slightly swollen but showed no sign of dangerous infection. Tiger applied fresh iodine and put on a clean bandage from his first aid kit. His touch was gentle as he wrapped the bandage around the digit, but he saw Grappler wince.

"Let me know if it gives you any more trouble," he said.

"Aw, lieutenant," Grappler mumbled. "Why, hell, I was bitten by a dog oncet. It was worse'n this."

Tiger couldn't help grinning at the double meaning.

Then the grin faded. There was work to do—grim work. The men were roused and a hasty breakfast of C rations were gobbled down.

The sun was coming up strong over the hump of mountains. Tiger dispersed his men along the trail on either side for fifty yards. There was the danger, of course, they would face bursting shrapnel from anti-aircraft gun if it went into action, but Tiger was gambling his daring strategy. They

were to remain in concealment until he gave the signal. Then . . . Tiger preferred to worry about that when the time came.

The Ranger force was a well rounded out army. There were four men looted from a crack artillery outfit. They could operate anything with a muzzle and a breach. They took over the Jap sky weapon.

There was a long two hour wait. The sounds of many motors carried plainly to the Rangers waiting tensely to smash out from ambush. A convoy was coming through, probably bound for Kododa.

Tiger was with the gun crew. He had that curious empty feeling in the pit of his stomach again. Outwardly he looked quietly calm. His tommy gun lay across his knees as he sat with his back to a tree. Across the trail, Grappler was stationed with the men at the machine gun.

The jungle had an atmosphere of silent naturalness. A flight of birds winged high overhead. Tiger glanced up at them and smiled. It was a good omen.

THEN all at once his body stiffened. He twisted to one knee and remained in a crouching position. His tommy gun was resting in the crook of his arm.

That almost straight stretch of hell looked peaceful enough. The muzzle of the sky gun was drawn back carefully behind a screen of foliage, yet a swift sweep of hand would tear away the camouflage. Sights had been lowered and fixed. A head-on direct hit couldn't miss whatever pushed into that bowling alley of the devil himself.

Tiger tried counting the spitting, snarling noises of the convoy motors. It sounded like a fairly large convoy. Perhaps a dozen trucks.

The minutes ticked by.

Then all at once—the lead truck rumbled into sight. Tiger's heart bounced wildly for an instant. It was jammed with soldiers. Troops bound for the battle zone!

This was going to be a desperate showdown—despite the heavy gun and deadly ambush. But Tiger's fears for his pitifully small band were shoved into the background of his mind. A slow, joyous grin stretched his large mouth. Well, they asked for it!

A second truck nosed into view just behind the convoy leader. That, too, was jammed with fighting men of Nippon. The load capacity was packed with about twenty men to a truck. The Japs were notorious for taxing their transportation facilities.

Up that fifty yard stretch rumbled the trucks. Three more troops-filled, followed behind.

Tiger was tense. They had run smack into a major convoy, it seemed. More trucks were coming up. Less than thirty yards from the deadly muzzle of that converted anti-aircraft gun the lead truck slowed down to a mere whisper of speed.

Tiger held his breath. More trucks were closing in. He counted twelve—and then they stopped coming. He felt a slight letdown of relief.

It could have been worse.

Three hundred against thirty! Ten to one odds!

The gun crew was ready to let loose. The lead truck started moving again. It crept closer and closer. Twenty-five yards . . . twenty . . . And then—Tiger ripped away the screen of foliage protecting the gun muzzle!

The shattering roar of a bursting shell smashed the jungle silence. The lead truck seemed to dissolve all at once into a puff of flame and smoke. Grappler's machine gun cut loose seconds after that deadly salvo.

Man-created hell let go. The gun

crew slammed home another shell. The blast of its fury made slaughter of the trapped convoy. There were screams and hoarse shouts as two more shells smacked into the very heart of the troop trucks. Panicky figures dove into the road to escape the deadly shelling. A truck exploded with a terrific burst of shooting fire as a shell tore it to shreds and ignited its gasoline.

Men were pouring from the undamaged trucks and Grappler's machine gun was busy remembering Pearl Harbor and Java and Singapore.

The gun crew ceased firing and snatched up tommy guns. The concentrated snarl of their challenge to the stunned convoy was the signal the men in the brush had been waiting for. From a dozen points the fury of their guns slashed a murderous cross fire into the ranks of the enemy running for cover. The fresh surprise stopped them cold. They were cut down by the dozens.

COMPLETELY demoralized, the remnants of the few survivors crashed into the jungle. Most of them came from the last three trucks that had escaped the first salvos of shell fire. They disappeared into the heavy brush. A wounded Jap managed to get a machine gun mounted on the rearmost truck into action. Its mad chatter made a hot corner for four Rangers starting to come into the open. Two of them ducked back for cover. The other two didn't quite make it.

A slim, wiry figure stepped from behind a tree to the left of that single machine gun. The gunner saw him and swung his weapon around for a burst. It was the little Pole!

Pulaski raised his tommy gun to his shoulder and taking unhurried aim, squeezed the trigger. He used six bullets. They all smacked into the Jap's chest. Lead kicked up spurts all around

Pulaski as the dying gunner tried to bring his own weapon into action, then slid away from it onto the floor of the truck.

With that concentrated burst of tommy gun fire, signalling the real attack, Tiger leaped from concealment. In two jumps he was on the road running towards the blazing trucks. A blood spattered Jap staggered from behind a shattered twist of wreckage. He had a rifle. A quick shot flamed past Tiger's head. Before he could get off another, Tiger riddled him with a reckless burst of lead, shooting from the hip. The Jap crumpled.

From inside a truck, two rifle shots kicked up dirt in front of Tiger. Lead burned across his right arm. Before he could get the hidden rifleman, a tommy gun opened up from the jungle in a direct line with the truck. The rifle kicked no further dirt into Tiger's face.

Rangers were coming out of the undergrowth now. Several had been hit by flying metal. None, however, had been wounded by Jap gunfire. The attack had been too sudden and devastating. Tiger had underestimated the terrible havoc that sky weapon could stir up.

Tiger could feel a slight stickiness where his arm had been ripped by enemy lead. But the bleeding appeared to have stopped. In the excitement of the moment, he hardly felt any pain.

Quickly he marshalled his men together. And taking inventory of the battleground, issued terse orders. The dead and mangled bodies of the little yellow men were everywhere. Many lay in crumpled heaps on the damp earth where they had dropped when machine gun fire had cut the life out of them. Figures draped over the sides of battered twisted trucks.

There were no survivors—except the handful that had escaped into the jungle.

"Boy, I'd love to send me old lady a pitcher back in Brooklyn," Grappler said. "What a purty sight."

There was a dull thud from behind a truck. Tiger spun. Pulaski came into the open wiping a blood smear off his gun butt with a ragged sleeve.

He looked up coolly. "We almost missed one," he said.

Cunard, the big ex-engineer, said gruffly, "The rat with the machine gun got Stevens and Smith." A trickle of blood ran down the side of his face from a bullet scrape. He paid no attention to it.

Tiger took a deep breath. Two more gone! Yet it hadn't been too big a price to pay for the job they had done. Thirty against three hundred!

The Swamp Fox had cracked the first stinging lash of his vengeance whip with less!

Tiger's voice was steady as he said, "Sergeant, take a detail of six men and bury Stevens and Smith."

Cunard's big square jaw trembled for an instant. Stevens had been with him at Milne Bay.

"Yes, sir," he replied.

TIGER drove the others unmercifully to complete the job they had started out to do. The gun crew that had smashed the backbone of any possible Jap resistance to the trap rigged up a device with fine wire and hand grenades around the sky gun. Gun and shells would be blown to bits when the Japs tried to salvage it.

Wreckage of the convoy made the trail impassable. Tiger regretted the fact that they would have to abandon the intact truck up ahead with its full tank of gasoline. He had two hand grenades placed under the chassis so that when the brakes were released, a trip would release the firing pins.

Half a dozen land mines were carefully set into the middle of the blitzed

convoy and well hidden. Any attempts to remove the debris would set them off. The remaining mines were set in the trail a quarter of a mile farther up.

Tiger's grim preparations would bear out his silent vow that further traffic along the route would delay precious hours until the big Allied push against Buna and Kokoda started.

The grisly job was completed in two hours. Two graves had been dug along the side of the trail and the limp bodies of the two Rangers had been covered over. Cunard had found a set of pioneer tools on one of the trucks to help speed the job.

Tiger didn't waste too much time lingering over the graves of their fallen comrades. He knew Stevens and Smith would have cried out, "Get going, gang! You've got a job to do."

For a brief matter of seconds, twenty-eight men stood rigidly at attention while Tiger repeated a simple, almost forgotten prayer.

Then a picked firing squad, using Jap rifles, sent three sharp volleys thundering into the jungle silence.

It was a fitting gesture.

Replenished with fresh water taken from the Japs, and several submachine guns with a plentiful supply of ammunition besides a number of hand grenades, the band of Rangers struck off for the northwest. They cut through the mountainous jungles, keeping close to the supply route. It would bring them to their next objective.

No more convoys came rumbling through to challenge them. The hot New Guinea sun sweltered the raiders as they pushed grimly down steep slopes and sliced deeper into enemy territory.

Tiger's arm started to bother him. He had almost forgotten about it. A quick checkup after the ambush had disclosed a slight gash just below the shoulder. Now it started to shoot pain through him.

At their third rest, he opened his shirt and had Grappler dress the wound and bandage it. Infection was a deadly enemy in these tropical climes, but he threw caution to the winds. There was little time to worry about himself.

In the late afternoon a drone of plane motors sent the little band deep into the jungle thickness for cover. From where they blended into the treacherous background of jungle Tiger spotted three Jap planes flying at five hundred ceiling. They were coming in from the eastern part of the island, probably from a Salamaua base. The enemy fighters swooped over the jungle less than two hundred yards from where Tiger and his men lay buried out of sight.

Tiger figured simple arithmetic. The Japs who had escaped the murderous trap had given the warning.

Tiger realized its grim significance only too well. The bait had been gobbled up. The hunter would become the hunted from here in! He watched as the planes circled and swept down on the jungle treetops a mile to their left.

The bloodhounds had wings! The chase was on!

In fifteen minutes, the enemy scouting formation was out of sight.

THEN a fresh series of sounds broke into the ears of the Rangers. Motors coming up the supply trail.

Tiger ordered his men to remain hidden. Taking Pulaski and Grappler with him, he headed for the trail. It was less than a hundred yards from where they crouched out of sight.

The rumble of the motors came louder now. Tiger picked a careful trail through the heavy forest. From a rise in the terrain overlooking a steep climb in the trail he sank into the reedy grasses. Grappler and Pulaski ranged on either side of him.

They didn't have long to wait.

A mechanical caterpillar rumbled into sight and gouged its way up the trail. Four more followed close behind. Jap light tanks!

Tiger grinned.

He could well understand the panicky reaction of the convoy survivors. Exaggeration was a major Japanese weakness. They had probably placed the raiders' numbers in four figures.

A long line of troop-laden trucks followed behind the tanks. Tiger could see the sweaty, yellow profiles of the Nips as they swarmed past the hiding place.

He almost wished he had saved a few of those land mines for just such a spot as this. He had never seen what one could do to a tank or enemy jammed truck.

It took twenty minutes for the Jap war convoy to pass. There were ten tanks and nineteen trucks. Tiger estimated the force at four hundred men. There were even three light field pieces.

"They flatter us," he told his two companions once the convoy had gone out of earshot.

"I wish I had a grandstand seat when those guys find what's left of Number One," Grappler said wistfully. "Boy, what fun when those mines go off."

"I'm more interested in where they came from," Tiger replied. "They got here in one hell of a hurry considering we aren't near U. S. Highway Number One."

"I'm ready, sir," Pulaski said. His thin lips were tight and humorless.

"Somebody musta fed you peppermint sticks made of dynamite," Grappler said. "I never saw a guy who enjoyed his target practice like you."

Pulaski shrugged slightly. "Too bad you weren't in Warsaw, Sergeant," he spat.

Grappler glanced quickly at the angry scar on the Pole's jaw. "Sorry,

pal," he said. "I kinda forgot."

Tiger said nothing. Mere words couldn't snap a ruthless monster's backbone. It took guys like Pulaski and Grappler and Stevens and Smith.

The trio went back to the others.

Tiger allowed ten minutes for a quick meal. There wasn't much. More C rations. Concentrated biscuits, a can of corned beef hash, and a square of chocolate. A few swallows of precious water sufficed instead of using the powdered coffee concentrate.

"If I ever see Broadway again, I'm gonna get me a steak the size of a house and top it off with two more steaks for dessert," Grappler said, gulping down a mouthful of hash and making a face.

"Nuts!" Cunard retorted. "I'll bet you ain't never seen Broadway."

GRAPPLER grinned wickedly. "Don't you guys ever read the newspapers? Once I wrestled the Purple Monster at the Coliseum. I'da won the title, too, oney I wuz robbed. Anyway, I meets a nifty little number in a joint on Sixth Avenue. Oh, boy! Some babe!"

Cunard grinned back. "I can't believe it with a mug like yours!" he taunted.

"Okay, wise guy!" Grappler growled. "But remember, when your tongue starts hanging out for a date, you're gonna be sorry. This babe has a nifty sister. Anyway, they said they was gonna wait fer me—I hope," he added wistfully.

The remark brought a round of laughter. It did much to relieve the crackling tension of the past twenty-four hours.

Tiger smiled faintly. He was grateful for the presence of the squat mat artist.

He allowed the men the precious luxury of a quick smoke, despite the

added chances he was taking. But the privilege was well worth the risk. When he gave the order to resume marching, the Rangers showed fresh life. Their morale had zoomed three hundred percent.

They stuck close to the supply trail, although well out of sight. The sun had disappeared over the mountains again and darkness started to close in.

Tiger found a suitable semi-clearing, well screened on all sides. He called a halt.

Gratefully the men dropped to the ground. Tiger posted four men on sentry duty. He had planned to remain awake himself. There were a thousand and one plans filtering through his weary mind. Tomorrow would bring them in contact with one of the many trailside bases that stretched out through the jungles from Lae and Salamua. They had to be eliminated somehow, one by one.

Delay! That had been the orders from MacArthur. Disrupt enemy supplies and communications. Vital delays that would help smash the enemy back into the sea.

Twenty-eight stubborn fighting men and a grinning six-foot devil to lead them!

Back in the swamps of Georgia, a fiery little patriot with a game leg had faced odds as great—and had won!

Tiger had no idea how long he slept. Strong fingers digging into his ribs woke him up. He stared a moment at the bright moon overhead, then brought his gaze around into the tight features of Pulaski. The little Pole appeared steady enough, but Tiger could sense a mad excitement emanating from the man.

"Sorry to bother you, sir," Pulaski whispered. "Jap patrol heading this way. Coming from the south."

Tiger jumped to his feet. His mind was fully alive to the danger now.

"Rouse the men," he ordered.

"I've already done that," Pulaski said. "We're waiting—for orders."

Tiger reached down and picked up his web belt with his .45, compass compartment, canteen, and first aid packet. Automatically he buckled it around his waist.

"Take French with you and go out to the trail. Return here as soon as you spot any enemy movements," he commanded.

"Right, sir!" Pulaski replied.

Grappler moved towards him out of the shadows. He was carrying his tommy gun.

"I've posted four men to cover our flanks," he reported, and added, "Wonder how those guys found our trail so fast?"

TIGER was wondering the same thing. There was a sparkle in his eyes as he reached out for his own tommy gun. His blood was pounding with excitement.

There was a slight twinge of pain in his wounded arm as he moved it, but otherwise it felt all right. There was no time to worry about it—not with the prospect of clashing with the enemy again.

He spread his remaining force in a semi-circle, fanning out to the flanking protection of his advance scouts. Now—there was nothing to do but wait. They would be mince-meat for Jap tactics if they attempted to move from their positions. The best strategy was to keep them guessing—as long as possible. The final element of surprise lay with the Rangers.

Tiger spent the longest fifteen minutes of his life just waiting. Then Pulaski came swiftly and noiselessly through the brush.

"Jap patrol coming down the trail," he whispered. "About ten men. They've got two blacks with them."

That was the answer! Tiger realized it before the words were hardly out of Pulaski's mouth. The cunning devils were using the native trackers to find them!

Grappler, who had gone out to check the flanks of the defenders, came in several minutes later.

"There's more of them closing in from our right, lieutenant," he panted. "The damned jungle is full of 'em."

Tiger's face hardened.

Under no circumstances must the Japs get an inkling of the smallness of the invading force. A quick order sent his men fanning out to deeper positions until the little band stretched into a precariously thin battle line some two hundred yards wide. Each man understood his job.

Tiger went back with Pulaski towards the trail. They could hear soft crackling noises getting closer. Tiger's fingers were tightly curled around his tommy gun.

Then suddenly a shaft of moonlight disclosed three creeping forms fifteen yards ahead. Tiger had his gun to his shoulder in a flash. He took quick aim and squeezed the trigger. The chatter of lead smashing into those slinking figures sounded like hell bursting loose from a machine gun. Almost immediately, gunfire crackled furiously all up and down the Ranger battle line. The air resounded to the screams and shouts from twenty-nine husky American throats. They made a terrific noise.

The jungle blazed with answering gunfire from a dozen points. Figures silhouetted against the moonlight. The wild confusion created by the Rangers doubled with the power of bursting lungs flinging challenge into the enemy ranks.

Tiger bellowed like an enraged jungle cat as he plunged recklessly towards the spot where the slinking shadows had been a moment before. Two of

them lay in crumpled heaps on the ground. A rifle spat from behind a tree in line with Tiger. He could feel the spang of lead grazing his left ear. He saw a brief outline of a figure ducking from behind the tree and let loose with a short burst from his gun. Then without warning two short figures popped up out of the brush on either side of him. Before he could whirl, they were lunging at him. Tiger caught a momentary glint of moonlight on cool steel. Cold steel never reached him on his left. A snarl of gunfire behind Tiger dissolved that lunging menace. Tiger did the only thing possible to save himself from being skewered on a Jap bayonet. He hurtled forward in a low diving tackle, felt the rip of steel skidding and twisting through his combat pack strapped to his shoulder as he crashed into the Jap, knee high. That pack probably saved his life.

HE smacked his attacker with everything he had. The Jap was no line bruiser playing tackle for the Green Bay Packers. He went flying back—but hard! His rifle with its bayoneted point tore loose from where it had sliced into Tiger's pack and skidded into the dirt several feet away.

Tiger thought he heard brittle bones crack. The Jap didn't move as he pushed painfully to his feet. He had his Tommy gun still clenched in one tight fist. Somehow he had hung onto it as he had made the tackle.

Gunfire was still crackling all around him. Then a hoarse voice yelled behind him, "Are you hit, lieutenant?"

Tiger spun. It was Pulaski.

"I'm okay," he shouted above the gunfire. "Thanks for taking out that other Jap."

He discovered he was talking to thin air. Pulaski, reassured that his leader was unhurt, had plunged into the shadows—looking for more target practice.

The fight lasted less than ten minutes. The gunfire died away abruptly. The Jap patrols had beaten a wild retreat. Unsure of the odds they had stumbled into, they had taken the safest way out—for the present.

But Tiger knew they would be back—with vengeance!

It took until the early streaks of dawn for Tiger to collect his scattered band. With sinking heart, he counted noses. Four men were missing. It had been a costly skirmish.

One thing smacked Tiger squarely between the eyes. Pulaski was not among the grim, haggard figures gathered in a slash of ravine less than half a mile from the moonlit battle ground. There wasn't one chance in a thousand of the Pole—if he were still alive—to get out with a whole skin. The area would be a death trap now that the enemy had tracked down the raiders.

The men were busy treating their wounds. They were, for the most part, of little severity. One man had a bullet hole in his right shoulder. He was the only serious casualty. A big mountaineer from the hills of Tennessee used a jack knife seared by match flame to dig out the lead.

"Ef yo-all been feudin' like me fer long about ten years, you'd find it purty simple," he explained while he worked. The wounded man's features were screwed up in pain, but he never uttered a sound.

The job was finally completed. The mountaineer held up a bloody chunk of lead. "Ain't got no hikka, or I'd fix it up right purty, bud," he said.

The Ranger grinned weakly. "You're doing okay, pal," he choked.

While the men grabbed a mouthful of food from their fast disappearing supplies, Tiger pondered the situation. It was critical, he admitted. Hell would be popping before long. Alone—he would have struck out towards his next

objective—come hell or the devil himself. But he had twenty-four other lives to consider.

A sudden dull explosion far from the southeast brought him out of it.

"Number one going up, I'll bet," Grappler cried. "Bet those Japs wouldn't rest until they poked their way through, hey, lieutenant?" He was as tickled as a schoolboy on his first date.

Tiger nodded. He could picture the consternation and panic of that tank and troop convoy. Well, the Japs hadn't conquered all the strategy lying around loose yet.

THAT explosion helped him to make up his mind.

"Nelson!" he snapped.

Grappler grinned. "Yessir!"

"See that the men discard every bit of excess equipment we can spare," Tiger instructed. "We're traveling light — and fast!"

"Right!" Grappler said, and unhooking his gas mask, dropped it on the ground. "Now I'll have to find me a new place to keep me tobacco."

The men stripped down to practically everything but their food which they kept in their lightened combat packs, water, ammunition, first aid pouch, knife, fork, and spoon. They even added their mess kits to the growing pile on the ground.

"It's neck meat or nothing," Tiger told Grappler. "We'll find fresh supplies before nightfall—or we won't be needing them."

"I get it," Grappler replied.

The desperate band went into high gear. Tiger pushed them hard. Craggy slopes fell behind them as the morning wore on. They fought their way through stretches of swamp where millions of hybrid insects played hell with exposed flesh. Twice they made wide detours away from the vicinity of the

supply trail to avoid patrols of Japs combing the jungle for them.

By noon they were on the point of exhaustion. The Ranger who had been wounded in the shoulder collapsed.

"Go on," he begged when Tiger halted his men. "I'm holding you back."

Tiger remembered overhearing a conversation. The man had a wife back in Hoboken and a blue-eyed baby he had never seen. He had begged for the privilege of coming along.

Tiger had a crude litter made. Four men carried their wounded comrade despite his curses and pleas to be left behind. At fifteen minute intervals, a fresh crew of men would take up the burden.

Morning dragged into early afternoon. They had come down from a short range of mountains and had dipped into flat jungle country. Far ahead of them to the north was another range of towering peaks. Beyond them lay the coast of Salamua and Lae.

Tiger was beginning to despair of the job they had set out to do. They were wandering in a treacherous haystack looking for a mighty slim needle. Surely by this time, Tiger reasoned, they should have struck some sort of Jap base.

Grappler and a thin-faced bony Ranger who had punched cows in Texas came back from a scouting trip. Their uniforms were in shreds from encounters with sharp thorns and thick underbrush.

"Not a damned thing but this stinkin' jungle, Lieutenant," Grappler said disgustedly. "Something tells me I shoulda stayed home and made some real dough."

Tiger couldn't help smiling.

"Never mind " His voice trailed off, and his anxious eyes darted skyward. Winged at less than a thousand ceiling from the northwest were a

formation of huge Jap transport ships—clever imitations of the big Douglas C-54's being used in China.

Twenty-five pairs of eyes followed their flight as they started to drop lower, circle around a portion of jungle less than two miles from where the Rangers were, and dip for a landing.

Renewed life surged through Tiger. By some miraculous reckoning, they had stumbled upon one of the answers to the Jap supply problem. Feeder base in the jungle from whence the overland trails carried trucks of men and supplies to the Jap lines at Kokoda. There was no doubt in Tiger's mind that they had stumbled upon one of the vital points of distribution. Finding it had been one of the main reasons for the expedition. Allied G-2 had known vaguely of its existence.

And now—twenty-five exhausted men had found it!

TIGER would have cheerfully sacrificed himself and his tiny command at that moment for a portable radio unit. A terse message to Port Moresby—and Allied bombers would have blasted it out of existence in a matter of minutes.

The matter of taking a compact radio set along had been a sore point in planning the expedition. Tiger had argued for it. Men who had thought they were wiser in jungle warfare had out-argued him. The expedition had been an independent undertaking. Once it had left allied-held territory, it was on its own. Extra weight counted out there in the jungle. And speed was essential.

Tiger cursed the short-sighted brass hat who had been against the idea of sending out the men in the first place.

Now the success of destroying the supply base rested entirely in the hands of twenty-five men!

The base would be heavily guarded. That Tiger well understood. There

would be anti-aircraft guns, and machine guns, and plenty of troops. As an essential halfway marker towards Kokoda, Jap concentrations of manpower would be heavy.

"We've got one chance in ten thousand of destroying that base," Tiger told his men bluntly. He glanced at Grappler for a moment. "It might be a mighty long time before you ever see that nifty blonde on Sixth Avenue, Nelson."

Grappler grinned fiercely. "Aw, hell, lootenant," he protested, turning red. "Those babes come a dime a dozen."

"I got a hankering to exercise my trigger finger," Cunard, the ex-engineer, broke in. And added, "Anybody got any objections?"

It appeared that no one had. The men were eager to pit their wits against the enemy.

Tiger estimated carefully their present position relative to that of their objective. They lay in a direct line. Their passage, he knew, would take them through some pretty heavy jungle. And he did not underestimate Jap cunning for a moment. Warned that Allied raiders were in the territory, they would be watchful and alert for attack. And the problem of the wounded man bothered him. They couldn't leave him behind at the mercy of a Jap patrol. After that grim trap they had sprung, the yellow devils would give little mercy.

The pitifully small force started forward, cutting a trail in a direct line with where the base lay. They would move a few yards at a time—and stop. Then Tiger would worm forward a short distance to scout any possible danger, pick his route, and wriggle back to the main force.

They heard the roar of powerful motors as two transports took off for the coast. From their blanket of green jungle they could not see the ships, but

from the sound, they appeared to be closer.

Then Tiger almost made a fatal mistake that would have brought disaster upon them all. Pushing ahead of the others to find their next course, his left hand struck a twisting liana across his trail. As he drew back the fingers, the liana moved a fraction. Just enough for Tiger to spot an almost invisible wire stretching across the ground over which he was about to crawl. He jerked back, heart pounding.

Then he cursed softly. He didn't need any blueprints to read the answer to that wire.

The Japs had the area mined!

Tiger was sweating freely now. A light darkness was mantling the jungle. For the little band to continue ahead would be sheer suicide. But the discovery brought out one fact. They were perilously close to the supply base.

TIGER was uneasy. They faced discovery at any moment. Attack was impossible without knowing the strength and disposition of guns and troops at the base. Under other circumstances he would have laughed away the chances of twenty-five men destroying this vital point.

Tiger found nothing amusing in the thought.

Instructions from MacArthur's headquarters had been made quite clear—disrupt enemy communications and supply lines!

Shivering in the damp chill of the Georgia swamps, the man history had called the Swamp Fox had wrestled with tougher problems. He had had few guns, little equipment; but had had a stout heart and a burning desire to smash the enemies that were threatening the priceless thing he had been fighting for—freedom!

MacArthur had sent a grinning six foot devil into the jungle of New Guinea

for the same kind of a fight. . . .

Tiger slipped off his combat pack. And handing his tommy gun to Grappler who was at his side, whispered softly, "I'm going on in for a looksee. Keep the men out of sight and don't move at any price. If something should happen—to delay me—you'll attack at dawn, sergeant!"

"But lieutenant!" Grappler protested.

"That's an order!" Tiger snapped.

Grappler's mutterings under his breath died away. Ex-corporal Francis Kelly was one hell of a stubborn guy!

The men realized that Tiger was up to something. They showed it in their restlessness. But not a man uttered a sound.

Tiger had a last word for Grappler. "Remember—that base must be destroyed." And he added, "Happy hunting, pal."

Then he was gone, crawling into the darkness. That welcome moon was up there in the starlit heavens to guide his path. Without it, he would have been lost. Nature still packed a wallop for the allies.

His stomach was tight and nervous as he crawled along, inch by inch, making as little noise as possible. Any moment he expected to touch one of those damnable wires and blow himself to kingdom come. After making progress for twenty-five yards, he tossed caution and the book of rules into the soup.

He was grinning as he stepped up his speed. The corporal who had made a quarter of a mile swim from a blasted motor barge into the teeth of hell at Tulagi was coming back into his own.

It took him two hours of crawling through that jungle hell to reach the supply base. He came upon it suddenly. One moment he was pushing his way through a heavy screen of brush—the next, he burst unexpectedly into

the open. Before his eyes lay a huge expanse of cleared ground. The landing field! He could see the shadowy batwinged sky monsters half hidden beneath camouflage at one end of the clearing. Short figures slipped along the border of jungle they had pushed back to make room for the flying giants. Tiger could hear voices, low and guttural.

Carefully he withdrew from sight, but not enough so that he couldn't see the setup of the base itself. To his right, across the clearing, was a low, native shed disappearing into the jungle itself. There were three more that Tiger could see from where he lay. These were, he judged, supply dumps. Number one on his own private hit parade.

He started to crawl deeper into the Jap defense area to a spot where he saw the long snout of a field piece pointed skyward. He never quite made it.

There was a crackling noise behind him. Tiger twisted around. A stocky Jap sentry had unwittingly stumbled onto him.

The Jap spotted Tiger at the same instant that the American sprang towards him.

The Jap made no effort to use his rifle. With the element of surprise removed, he dropped the weapon and lifted his arms as Tiger crashed into him.

THE force of the impact smashed both men to the ground. Tiger reached out desperately to get his fingers around that short thick neck before alarm could be given. But he wasn't fast enough. He felt fingers stab at his shoulder, then an electrical spasm of agony charged his body. It stiffened from the shock. Before Tiger could recover from his partial paralysis that seemed to freeze his movement,

the Jap had rolled from under him and had sprung to his feet. The momentary shock passed and Tiger sent a fist crashing for the Jap's head.

Things started to happen almost too fast for Tiger to follow. The Jap took a quick side step to the right, keeping the foot rigid, at the same time bending his left knee from the waist at a fifteen degree angle, and making a half turn.

Tiger's fist cut into empty air. The entire action took but a matter of seconds. As Tiger drew back to launch another blow, the silent Jap took a step forward, ducked away from the murderous fist for second time. Then with a lightning stab, he shot out his left hand for Tiger's elbow, and moving in, jabbed his right foot behind Tiger's. The American felt a hand ram against his chin—and he experienced the sensation of smashing over onto his back.

The counter attack took Tiger by surprise. But he realized in a flash that he was dealing with an enemy who knew how to use the deadly jiu-jitsu.

Still the Jap did not cry out an alarm. That suited Tiger fine. He was back on his feet in seconds springing forward for another try. The Jap seemed to be taunting him now. He was greased lightning, sliding away from those murderous fists. Then a sharp blow struck Tiger at the base of the nose between the lips and nose.

Tiger saw blinding flashes before his eyes. He staggered, trying to keep on his feet, and fell forward on his face. The cagy Jap had delivered the famous *nincho*.

Tiger had a splitting headache when he opened his eyes, some time later. He discovered that he was propped against a corner of a thatched hut. A light was burning, carefully shielded from the outside. It was a modern gasoline lantern.

Tiger also discovered that his hands

and feet were bound tightly behind his back. Rawhide thongs cut into his wrists.

Tiger looked around. When his eyes became accustomed to the shadows the light reflected, he saw something else. A thin Japanese officer was standing on the other side of the hut watching him. Tiger could see the cruel twist of narrow tight lips.

"Well," he said, trying to keep his voice cheerful, "looks like old home week. This couldn't be Tulagi or Guadalcanal by chance?"

The officer stepped across the hut.

"We are honored by your unexpected visit, American dog!" he spat in excellent English. "Perhaps your comrades will join us soon—yes?"

Tiger grinned. "Come again, pal," he said. "I got trouble with my ears. I don't hear so good."

The Jap bowed stiffly. "Lieutenant Yoshira, at your service," he said. "Perhaps we can help remedy the ah—difficulty."

Tiger took a strong grip on the despair clutching at him. "Can the Harvard accent and get down to business, monkey," he said coolly. "I ought to boot myself for letting a little yellow squirt throw me for a loss, but since I'm here—so what?"

"That is exactly what we would like to know," Yoshira purred.

Tiger grinned into those leering features. "I was on a fourteen mile hike," he said. "I'm a boy scout."

Yoshira's right hand seemed to snake out all at once. His fingers left a red welt across Tiger's left cheek.

"We have patrols out tightening the trap around your comrades," he said. "They will not escape."

TIGER played out his bluff. "Look, monkey," he said, "our gang plays rough. Or maybe you didn't see the morning newspaper. We cleaned up a

few vermin yesterday. That's only a starter. Why, pal, we've got six hun—" He stopped abruptly.

Yoshira's face lighted up for an instant. Then his features turned passively bland.

"You were saying?" he said.

"Skip it," Tiger replied. "I shoot off my mouth too much, anyway." He tried to express chagrin the best he could.

Hollywood would have applauded his efforts.

Yoshira started to reply, but the words were never uttered. A terrific explosion rocked the ground. In its wake rifle fire knifed the jungle stillness that followed.

A figure darted inside the hut and babbled out a wild stream of Japanese. Yoshira snapped back an order. Then he turned to Tiger.

"So?" he said. It was a chapter of significance in itself.

Tiger felt sick inside. He thought of Grappler and the others. That explosion had been a mined area going up!

"Make yourself comfortable, dog," Yoshira spat at Tiger. "I will return soon. And then—" He smiled wickedly. "—We shall, as you Americans say, talk cold turkey."

Tiger's heart sank as he watched Yoshira leave the hut.

It looked like the beginning of the end.

While Tiger was being held captive at the Jap supply base, hell had busted loose in the jungle where Grappler and his men lay in wait for their leader to return.

When the first hour dragged by without a sign of Tiger, Grappler began to get nervous. He was all for the idea of going after him.

Cunard held him back. "Now look, buddy," he said, "the lieutenant gave us orders to wait here. You're running

the show now, but we rank the same. I'm not risking the necks of these guys because you got hot pants. The lieutenant can take care of himself. We're staying put."

"I still don't like it," Grappler muttered. "Why for a plugged nickel, I'd go in and clean out that joint myself." But he steadied under Cunard's sane logic.

The men were restless. They were eager now to finish the job. Each man realized that he had a mighty slim chance of getting out alive—but MacArthur had handpicked this group. They were plenty tough. It would take a lot of killing to stop them.

Time crawled. At the end of two hours Grappler made up his mind.

"Look, pal," he growled at Cunard, "we've given the loot plenty of time. They musta got him. We're going in."

Cunard didn't object much. He was beginning to get uneasy himself.

Grappler passed the word around to get ready for action. He crawled over to where the man with the shoulder wound lay on the crude litter.

"We got a special job for you, Buck," he said. "How's the wing holdin' up?"

Buck grinned through the darkness. "Swell," he lied.

Grappler couldn't see the twisted features screwed up in agony.

"Now look," Grappler explained, his voice barely above a whisper, "you gotta stay here and guard the equipment. You can still handle a gun, cantcha?"

"You bet," Buck said. But he felt too weak to argue. He knew that Grappler knew, too, that guarding the equipment was a pretty poor excuse to leave him behind. The men had very little except their combat packs.

SATISFIED, Grappler crawled over to Cunard who was checking on the final details of their plan of attack.

They would fan out and hit the base along a deep battle line.

An unexpected twist of fate upset the applecart. A mighty explosion shattered the jungle silence without warning. The ground trembled for a moment from the concussion. The explosion was several hundred yards to the right of the raiders.

With the first thunderclap, Grappler had thrown himself flat. As the earth shaking jar subsided, he leaped to his feet.

"Land mine!" he cried hoarsely. "Let's scram."

It was still a mystery what had caused it. Jap patrol setting it off by mistake—or what? But Grappler was moving out. The jungle would reek with yellow men before long.

"Four of you guys grab Buck's litter," he ordered hoarsely.

Cunard's voice cut him short.

"Buck's gone," he snapped.

Grappler didn't need an earthquake to help him put two and two together. Buck had simply taken the easiest way out—rather than to hinder his buddies in the tough job that lay ahead. Looking for him in that jungle hell was impossible.

There were twenty-two other guys to think about. Grappler went into action.

Issuing terse orders, the band moved swiftly in a wide arc to the left of the base. This would avoid pushing through the mined areas the Japs had sowed and give them a chance to cut around and strike from the opposite direction.

Grappler and his men hadn't gone very far when a Jap reception party gave them a warm welcome. One moment they had been pushing blindly through the jungle—the next, a machine gun cut loose almost directly in front of them. Jap machine gun nest!

A miracle saved Grappler's life. By rights he should have been cut to pieces

by that first deadly burst. He was in line with a thick boled tree when the burst went off. He dropped flat, cursing, as lead whined over his head. The two men just behind him weren't as lucky. Grappler could hear them hit the ground.

The band melted into the brush as the machine gun stabbed out, its tracers shooting pencils of lightning in the direction of the raider's original path.

Grappler dared to lift his head long enough to spot the nest. It was less than thirty yards away.

"Dirty yellow dogs!" Grappler gritted. The fingers of his right hand fumbled for the strap of his sack holding a supply of hand grenades. He twisted and jerked at it for a moment, then his fingers reached inside for a pineapple.

The Rangers lay motionless where they had dropped, waiting for the machine gun to cease firing. Grappler wriggled forward towards the nest. The heavy brush helped.

He found refuge behind a clump of trees less than fifteen yards from where he figured the nest was hidden.

Then, deliberately, he made a rustling noise to attract the attention of the Jap gunners. Almost immediately the gun blazed out again. That was all Grappler was waiting for. With the location of the gun fixed in his mind, he lay still a moment while the gun chattered several bursts in a quick sweep of the jungle before it. Then with a curse he jerked the pin free of the grenade and heaved it.

THERE wasn't much chance of it bouncing back off one of the trees. The path to the machine gun was open, allowing full sweep of the terrain for the hidden gunner.

There were several seconds of anxious waiting, then a blinding explosion mushroomed from the spot where Grappler had tossed the pineapple.

There wasn't much sound through the jungle after that, but the place was teeming with Japs. Grappler didn't need to have a blueprint for that. The cunning little devils would play possum, waiting for the raiders to make the next move.

The Rangers had had plenty of practice, training for just this kind of warfare. They backtracked, making as little noise as possible, moving yard by yard, resting a few seconds, then going on.

The chessmen of Mars had a long night of it. It was move and counter move. The darkness was just as dangerous for the Japs. Grappler gambled on the fact that they would wait until morning, confident that they had their enemies bottled up.

The gamble was equally distributed, however. Through the long hours of the night, the Rangers moved slowly and steadily in a wide arc that would bring them around to the opposite side of the supply base. Several times, movement nearby froze them for many minutes. Jap patrols were also playing a guessing game, trying to outmaneuver the raiders.

The first streaks of dawn climaxed the game of hide and seek with unexpected results. Grappler, wriggling along the ground ahead of his men, stumbled into the base motor park. It was sheer accident and almost cost Grappler his life. He ducked back out of sight just in time as a nervous sentry stepped from behind a tree less than ten yards from where he lay.

But what Grappler saw in that hacked out clearing made his eyes sparkle with the madness of a wild idea. There were six small tanks flanking dozens of trucks jammed into the jungle park. He could see their crews squatting on the ground. The place was rimmed with anti-aircraft guns and several machine guns were set up with

alert gunners on the job.

Grappler wormed his way back to the others. He crawled over to where Cunard lay.

Grappler whispered into his ear what he had discovered. Quickly the two of them worked out the details of an insane plan.

They had to capture those tanks at any cost. Using them as a spearhead, the odds of wrecking the base would dwindle to a fifty-fifty chance of success.

Grappler and a dozen men would rush the tanks, supported by gunfire from the pitifully few raiders remaining. Grappler hadn't the vaguest idea how to operate one of the tanks once they capture them—but he wasn't worrying. He had driven a five ton trailer with oranges from Florida once. Two of those selected for the big job had some experience with American M-3's before being drafted for Ranger duty. The others were in the same boat with Grappler. But this was no time to start worrying. They had to get to the tanks first.

WITH infinite slowness, the small band inched towards the motor park. The least sound would bring disaster upon them.

The odds for success lay in favor of the Rangers for the moment. The Japs had estimated the raiding force at several hundred. That Nipponese weakness for exaggeration was a determining factor.

The men selected for the job of pouring out a blanket of covering fire were moving into position. Grappler and his own squad spearheaded for a break in the underbrush in a direct line with those tanks. It took three quarters of an hour to complete the maneuvering.

Grappler in advance position took a last quick sweep of the battle ground before them. His gunners had received

their instructions. Knocking out the crews of the machine guns would come first. A few well placed hand grenades would take care of the anti-aircraft batteries. The main bulk of the armored personnel would fall to Grappler and his men.

The tank crews had gotten off the ground and were walking towards their jungle blitz buggies now. There wasn't another second to lose.

Grappler's bull-like roar, "Give it to 'em!" turned all hell loose. The first murderous cross fire of Ranger tommy guns wiped out three machine gun crews. And with the initial shattering burst of fire, Grappler plunged into the open, his tommy gun blazing away at the Japs before him.

Two of them leaped into the air like puppets on a string and flopped back to the ground. The tommy guns of Grappler's comrades accounted for seven more before the survivors of that deadly hail scampered behind trucks. A hand grenade exploded squarely in the midst of a sky battery twenty yards away. Gun, crew, and ammunition went up in a terrific blast. Lead screamed all around the advancing Rangers. One of them half spun and dropped as a shell splinter ripped through his body. Another staggered, clutching at his left arm. But he kept going.

Over the initial stunning blow of the surprise attack, the Japs put up quickly stiffening resistance. Two of them mounted a truck closeby and manned its swivel machine gun. They got in one long burst that cut down another Ranger. Before it could sweep the others, a deadly burst of tommy gun fire from the outer rim of the motor park made chop suey of the gunner. His comrade pushed the fallen body away from the gun and crouched over the sights. He never lived long enough to squeeze the trigger. A wild rebel yell

echoed above the sounds of gun fire. A second later a single bullet buried between the eyes of the Jap.

Before the Japs could rally their men and counter attack with telling effect, Grappler and the nine survivors of that mad dash across the open space to the tanks reached their objective. As Grappler threw himself at the open turret of the nearest tank, a squat figure darted out from behind the steel monster. Lightning fingers grabbed at Grappler and a quick twist pulled him off balance and sent him crashing to the ground. The Jap followed up with a stubby arm shooting downward towards Grappler's body, first two fingers stiffened. It was a quick execution of the dreaded *suigetsu* that would deliver the blow just below the breast bone in the solar plexus. The result would bring temporary paralysis.

BUT Grappler hadn't taken bruising punishment on the mat for nothing. He saw the blow coming. With a fast stab of his right hand he lashed out from a half sitting position. Strong fingers caught the Jap's arm as it descended. With a powerful jerk, Grappler literally whisked the little yellow monkey over on his back. He smacked hard. Grappler was on his feet a second later. Without releasing the iron grip on the other's arm, he pulled the figure half erect and with a savage smash from the heavy toe of his service shoe, planted a kick squarely in the squirming victim's groin.

With a quick movement he drove a murderous fist into the twitching features.

Grappler dropped his unconscious punch bag and leaped up for the turret of the tank again. A machine gun drummed lead all around him. A stinging bite of lead across the seat of his pants from a ricochet gave him the added impetus to tumble inside the

tank. A bloody faced Ranger was already inside.

"You take care of the gun, bub," Grappler snapped. "I'll take over."

Reaching up and slamming shut the turret top, Grappler squeezed into the small driver's seat of the two man hell wagon. He could hear wild shouts and defiant yells outside as he peered at the array of control devices and then reached out for what looked like the motor switch.

So far, so good! The tanks were theirs! Now—anything went. The Japs had retreated from the motor park to consolidate panicky forces and bring up reinforcements from the main base less than three hundred yards away. The surprise attack had caught them flatfooted. In the wild panic, they had no way of gauging the actual strength of the attacking force.

Grappler, experimenting madly with the tank controls found the motor switch by accident. The engine broke into a stuttering roar.

The next few seconds were a nightmare. The tank shot for a group of trucks, caromed off the nearest one with a shock that made its occupants dizzy as Grappler tried to throw the gears into reverse, and kept going right for the heart of the crowded park.

Four of the other tanks were going into action now as Ranger two-man crews took over. Two lifeless Yanks sprawled on the ground near the sixth tank, cut down by a Jap machine gun. From the brush in concealment on the edge of the park, the big Tennessee mountaineer had seen his two comrades almost reach that steel buggy when a burst of lead from gun mounted on a nearby truck had riddled their bodies.

The mountaineer triggered a burst at the frenzied Japs operating the gun. After three shots, the hammer clicked empty. Dropping the useless weapon, his ammunition completely expended,

the rebel feud-fighter crawled along the edge of the grass under cover towards that truck. His knee struck something as he wriggled along.

His fingers reached down the for object. A joyous gleam breathed fire into his anger-flushed features, as he hefted a short murderous blade, similar to a machete, that the Japs had evidently been using to hack away the brush.

The two Japs operating the gun on the truck heard a rustling less than a minute later. One whirled about and shrieked with terror.

A man monster wielding a scimitar of retribution showed powerful arms and shoulders just above the side rail of the truck. The Jap screamed a hoarse warning to his companion. The machine gun started to swivel around for a pointblank burst. It never quite made it. A long arm reached over the guard rail swinging the deadly blade. A bloody gurgle was the final utterance of the nearest Jap. Yellow flesh was softer than cutting swiss cheese.

THE other Jap forgot about that stuttering gun—abruptly. He spun and tried to claw his way over the opposite side of the truck, out of reach of that crimsoned blade.

The big Tennessean had once split the skull of a bear with a thrown axe. That brush knife was easier to handle. The power of a hundred and eighty-five pounds sent it whistling through the air point first. The Jap went over the side of the truck—plunging to the ground with the blade penetrating his stomach.

The Tennessean tumbled into the truck. Kicking aside the body of his first victim, he grabbed for the machine gun. A squad of Japs with Tommy guns were pouring through an opening in the brush on the opposite side of the motor park. He squinted through the sights of the gun for a cool moment, then squeezed the trigger.

The Nips seemed to melt into the dirt as lead tore through them. A captured tank shot from behind four trucks and zig-zagged crazily at the survivors of that deadly lead storm. Two more of the enemy were crushed to a pulp as the tank ran over them.

The motor park was a bedlam for several minutes as the surviving Rangers still afoot went to work with hand grenades. Then a terrific explosion at the far end of the park turned additional jungle transportation into twisted junk.

A precious gasoline dump became a blazing pyre. Grass caught on fire and in a few seconds, flames were shooting up from a section of the jungle.

In the lead tank crashing towards the main base, Grappler was having his hands full trying to control his lurching steel monster. He missed a thick tree by inches, crashed over half a dozen smaller ones. Then—almost point blank, a machine gun opened up. Lead spattered the sides of the tank. But the fire power wasn't heavy enough to do any damage.

Grappler gave the tank all it could take and shot at reckless, lurching speed towards the Jap gun crew that had set up its weapon to drive back the attackers. At the same instant, the bloody faced Ranger at the tank forward gun opened up. .50 calibre tracer stuff slammed into the enemy.

"Give 'em hell, Pete," Grappler yelled.

Pete's gun was doing a land office business. In the face of that withering fire, the Japs lost five of their men. The gun was still spurting when the tank slammed into the remnants of the crew.

Grappler was shouting at the top of his lungs.

"Here we come, you bums!"

The tank crashed through the jungle towards the main camp. The other four were coming right behind now,

leaving a blazing sheet of creeping flame at their backs. The job on the motor park had been a jackpot slam.

The supply base itself was in an uproar. Japs who had retreated from the motor park with the first blasts of gunfire gave warning that large forces of American troops had attacked. Jap officers were screaming orders at the top of their lungs trying to bring their men into some semblance of a battle line. There was no time to withdraw. And to leave the huge supplies of stores and ammunition behind would have been a major catastrophe.

The defenders of the base made their first fatal mistake—when two of the Ranger-commanded tanks burst into the open and rumbled across the emergency landing field.

IN THE belief that their tanks had cracked through the ring of attackers, two score Jap troops broke from concealment and advanced across that open no-man's land to form a fresh battle line behind the wall of steel.

It was a fatal mistake.

From all five tanks, now in the clearing poured a hail of lead as a .50 calibre orchestra burst into sharp crescendo. No flesh and blood could stand that terrible punishment. Trapped, the Japs were mowed down like stalks of grass. The tanks were moving fast towards the supply sheds just beyond the clearing. It looked like a grand slam.

Grappler was having the time of his life maneuvering his deadly play toy. He shouted, "If yer in there, loot, grab yer ears! The Fourth is comin' early this year."

His gunner punctuated the statement with a raking fire into an anti-aircraft battery trying to bear down on their gun for a point blank blast. Not for nothing had the Rangers spent weary hours shooting from every type of moving

vehicle.

Twice the Japs tried to man that gun. Twice tracer stuff ripped them into shreds.

Two of the tanks crashed into the jungle on the left of the clearing. A terrific explosion mushroomed fresh fire into the sky, seconds later. An ammunition dump went up, taking one of the tanks with it. But the jungle furnace, blazing with maddening heat, completed the job of driving back into the swamps the little yellow men who had survived the tornado of flying steel splinters. The other tank that had crashed into the dump area had been partly smashed. It lay on its side. Inside, two stunned Rangers groped dazedly to open the turret which had been jammed. As their senses returned to normal, they redoubled their efforts to escape from their choking prison. A wounded Jap, blood streaming from a gaping shrapnel hole in his side heard the pounding from inside the tank. With his last bit of dying strength he threw a hand grenade at the disabled hell wagon. The explosion literally ripped the turret loose.

The two Rangers tumbled through the smoking hole. Loosening their .45's from holsters, they staggered through a narrow cleft in the wall of fire slowly surrounding the tank. The flames breeched the cleft completely enveloping the tank seconds later. The fire was spreading rapidly, creeping towards the native hut where Tiger had been left, tied. . . .

Once that first mighty explosion had ripped through the jungle alerting the nervous Jap troops guarding the base, earlier in the waning hours of darkness, Tiger redoubled his desperate efforts to escape.

With Yoshira gone, he struggled and twisted his powerful arms in an effort to wrench his bonds loose. But the Japs had done a thorough job.

Long minutes sped by. Tiger was

bathed in sweat fighting those devilish thongs. His wrists were streaming blood. He was battling time. Grappler had had his orders to destroy the base at any cost if he failed to return. That jungle blast meant hell would be breaking loose before long.

Damn yellow devils! Tiger cursed and raged. He rolled over on his back and tried wriggling towards the entrance to the hut. If he could get outside, in the confusion he had a better chance of freeing himself.

His body stiffened all at once. He heard a sharp gasp outside the hut, then the sound of a falling body. Tiger rolled over to the side of the hut. Desperately he lashed out with his bound feet, trying to kick through the flimsy wall. Then without warning, a dark figure burst into the hut. Tiger caught a glimpse of a six-inch gleaming blade clutched in a tight fist. Then—he recognized the intruder despite the heavy swamp mud that covered him from head to foot. He would have recognized the cool, unhurried actions of that figure anywhere as he slowly glanced about the lighted interior.

"Pulaski!" Tiger cried.

THE figure whirled and saw Tiger against the flimsy wall.

"Lieutenant!" he said in amazement.

It was Pulaski without a doubt! That slightly slurred accent was unmistakable. The little Pole dropped beside Tiger. A few quick slashes with the knife, and he was free.

"Thought you were dead," Tiger panted, springing to his feet.

"I don't die easy," Pulaski shot back.

"Ran into a Jap patrol during the fight." He added, "I had a little trouble."

Running feet outside the hut cut him short. With a swift motion, he flattened against the wall next to the entrance. Tiger froze on the opposite side.

They heard a sharp exclamation. Then the snout of a tommy gun poked inside. Both men remained motionless. The cagy Jap wasn't sticking his neck into a trap. Tiger remembered Pulaski's clenched knife when he first entered the hut.

There would be a dead sentry outside.

The snout of the tommy gun dipped lower. Then flame burst from the muzzle all at once. The gun swept the entire hut. Lead kicked spurts all over the dirt. Tiger and the Pole pressed tight against their meagre protection. The burst of fire ceased abruptly. Then Tiger went into action. His arm swept towards that snout. With a quick motion strong fingers closed about the barrel. With a tremendous jerk, Tiger literally dragged the Jap behind the gun through the entrance. The daring move was completely unexpected. A short figure stumbled through the entrance. Before that gun could spout flame again, Pulaski leaped at the Jap. His arm descended into the small of the back, burying the knife up to the hilt. The Jap never even knew what struck him. Pulaski pulled it loose and wiped the blade on his sleeve.

Tiger snatched up the tommy gun.

"Come on," he whispered hoarsely.

He ran to the rear of the hut and kicked in part of the wall. The flimsy structure gave way, leaving a gaping hole. Tiger paused long enough to snatch the gasoline lantern from its suspended hook, hurled it across the hut. As it exploded, flames ate hungrily into the woven branches and foliage of the front wall.

Tiger and Pulaski ducked out into the open. Crouching low they dashed for a clump of trees ten yards behind the hut and dropped flat in the coarse jungle growth. The first streaks of dawn lightened the mask of darkness around them.

Tiger lifted his head cautiously. The hut was blazing brightly now. Hoarse shouts were giving warning that the enemy were in their midst.

Then all hell seemed to pop loose three hundred yards from where the two Rangers lay. The staccato of tommy gun fire stirred up life all around them. Two Japs ran past the grass where Tiger and Pulaski were. Tiger's capture weapon could have cut them down. But he was waiting for bigger game.

The firing grew heavier. Tiger was grinning broadly. Grappler and his men were wasting no time.

Five Japs lugging a heavy trench mortar and ammunition came out of the brush ten feet away. There was no hesitation by Tiger now. He popped out of concealment almost directly in the path of the mortar crew. Tiger could see gaping fear spread over them.

"This one's on me!" Tiger snarled, triggering his tommy gun from hip level.

THE Jap carrying the mortar caught the first burst in the stomach. He screamed and pitched forward on his face. Tiger got three more before the gun jammed. The single survivor had dropped his load of shells. He sprang at Tiger with bare hands. Pulaski shot in front of Tiger, his knife arm raised.

The Jap seemed to twist into thin air for a second. There was a blur of motion as swift execution of ju-jitsu whirled Tiger over the Jap and onto his back.

Tiger never gave the little yellow man a chance to get set again. He shot out his fingers for that thin throat as the Jap spun to take care of his second adversary.

Once those fingers dug into the flesh around the throat, it was all over but the shouting. Battle-madness gave Tiger the strength of three men. A

savage twist snapped the neck as easy as killing a chicken.

At the same moment, the gasoline dump went up!

Tiger let go of his dead victim. Pulaski was just getting to his feet. They could see flames shooting up over the jungle to their right. The Rangers were having a busy morning.

A machine gun suddenly opened up twenty yards to the left of the Rangers. Tiger and Pulaski had been spotted. With the first spatter of lead, they dropped flat and wriggled furiously towards the protective thickness of the brush behind them. The gun chased lead after them. Tiger could feel its hot breath licking inches from his body.

The roar of machine guns snarled closer. Jap resistance, however, seemed feeble. The machine gun licking out at Tiger and the Pole stopped. The Japs were moving to fresh positions. An invisible hand reached out and smacked Tiger flat as he started to rise from the ground. With it a thunderclap of hell split his eardrums.

The ammunition dump!

Tiger could feel a stunned numbness all through his body. He half rolled over. Pulaski was trying to grope to his feet.

"Come on," Tiger croaked, "We're getting out of here."

There were no Jap guns to riddle them as they stumbled through the jungle. The fierce tenor of the attack by a handful of American Rangers had completely demoralized the thinned out defenders. They had scattered in all directions.

As he ran through the jungle, Tiger's mind started functioning again. He suddenly remembered those two big transport planes that had been at the far side of the field. A daring idea seized him.

There was no telling how many of the original twenty four had survived that

mad attack on the base. Tiger doubted whether there were many still alive. Once the Japs reorganized their panicky men, the wrecked supply base would be an unhealthy place to remain near.

Pulaski was clipping at Tiger's heels. As they stumbled towards the direction of the transports, Tiger shot a few terse orders at him. They would gamble capturing one of the ships. Tiger realized the odds of success if the Japs figured on the same thing. The two Rangers were unarmed.

Tiger suddenly caught at Pulaski as he came abreast and jerked him behind a tree. Just ahead lay a stalled tank. Its turret popped open all at once. A bloody head appeared, then a pair of broad shoulders.

Rice and fish had never created anything like that. Tiger's veins were hot with excitement as he slipped from behind the tree and called out, "Hey, Yank!"

The bloody head spun. Then a bellying voice challenged, "Who's that!"

TIGER ran towards the tank. The Ranger had climbed free of the turret and was reaching inside to help his companion through the opening.

Grappler!

The ex-mat artist let out a roar of delight as Tiger came into the open.

"Lootenant! Oh, boy! Old home week!"

He had his buddy free of the tank now. The two of them dropped to the ground.

"Polack, you damned devil!" Grappler growled afresh as Pulaski came out from behind Tiger.

There was no time for exchanging of conversation. The Japs were counter-attacking. Their guns were cracking out from behind the blazing supply sheds.

A few quick words from Tiger ex-

plained the job they were going to tackle.

The transports lay in plain sight from where the quartet of rangers were. Without attempting further concealment, they broke into the open and started a mad fifty yard dash across the field. At the same instant, a dozen Japs broke from cover on the opposite side of the field. They had tommy guns. They spotted the Rangers. Lead flicked out at them as they picked up their heels.

It was a suicide dash—except for the unexpected in jungle warfare. One of MacArthur's soon-to-be-famous thirty staggered into the clearing a few yards behind them. Tiger saw his arm draw back. Then something sailed through the air, dropping squarely in the midst of the Japs. There was a blinding flash of fire and smoke enveloped the enemy group.

There were none standing when the smoke drifted away.

"Nice going, baby," Tiger yelled.

They were almost to the big ships. That lone figure across from them was stumbling towards it, too.

Then Tiger was crawling up on a huge wing and yanking open the cabin door.

Seconds were precious.

He was going to attempt to take the big crate off the ground, get back to Port Moresby, return to the base with bombing reinforcements and rescue the remnants of his shattered band—if any were still alive.

He had washed out of army flying after three months and four crackups. But he was confident he could get the transport into the air somehow.

Grappler had crawled into the cabin. Pulaski and Grappler's tank buddy were just coming alongside, supporting the Ranger who had tossed the pineapple into the Jap patrol that had tried to cut them off.

It was Buck who had slipped off his litter out there in the jungle and had crawled towards the supply base through the long hours preceding and following the attack.

Carefully, Buck was hoisted up into the cabin. Then the other two Rangers climbed in.

A sudden roar of twin props blasted out. Tiger had gotten the engines started.

"Hang on," Tiger shouted. "Here we go."

There wasn't time to warm up the engines properly. The Japs had filtered back to the base. Twin machine guns cut loose at the ship as it started to move across the ground.

From out of the jungle to the left a single figure dashed. Tiger, sweating at the unfamiliar controls, caught a quick glimpse of the slim Jap.

It was Yoshira!

THE man was running at a sharp angle that would bring him almost in the path of the transport. He held a hand grenade in one uplifted arm.

There was no mistaking Yoshira's grim purpose. It looked like the end of the trail.

Pulaski had seen the Jap, too. He grabbed at a tommy gun in a rack on the cabin wall. Praying that it had a full drum, he shoved the snout through a slot in the cabin window and taking quick aim, squeezed the trigger.

The Gods of War directed the line of fire that crumpled Yoshira just as he started to toss the grenade in the path of the ship. The grenade dropped from his lifeless fingers, rolled along the ground. Its explosion, less than thirty feet from the moving ship, scattered bits of the dead officer into the invisible arms of his honorable ancestors.

There was no time to dwell upon Yoshira's fate, however. The transport was bearing down on the flaming fringe

of the supply base. From either side, Jap guns chattered madly to stop its course. Lead riddled its fuselage and patterned towards the cabin.

Tiger took a deep breath, his fingers tight on the controls.

It was probably the worst takeoff in the history of military aviation. Grappler later swore that they carried half the jungle into the air with them. But somehow, they scraped over the wall of flame below and shuddered for altitude.

Tiger's mind was tormenting him as he cautiously nosed for plenty of ceiling. There were Rangers down there—some of them still alive, perhaps. He felt guilty and sick inside, leaving them behind. But the job was only half completed. A flight of B-24's would finish it.

"We're coming back!" he muttered.

Pulaski caught the toneless mumble.

"Don't worry about those guys down there, sir," he said. "They're tough. They'll hang on for quite some time."

"Yeah," Grappler cried. "And I hope that big lug, Cunard, ain't forgettin' . . . we got a date with a coupla nifties on Sixth Avenue."

It had been Cunard's tank that had destroyed the ammunition dump.

The big transport roared steadily towards Port Moresby.

It wouldn't be long before thirty names would be added to the growing roster of American heroes, to take their place in history.

One of those heroes—a little guy with a game leg and unquenchable courage—if he could have talked would have probably said, "Well done, you guys! I could have used you with me, all right!"

They had called him the Swamp Fox!

MacArthur had no Swamp Fox. . . . But there had been a grinning six foot devil. And a few other guys.

History would call them The Famous Thirty!

TELL IT TO THE U. S.



His gun thundered and bucked in his hands, and

CHAPTER 1

PICK OUT YOUR PALLBEARERS!

A GOOD chicken house for laying hens is twenty feet square and has a level set of roosts running across the back of it which will accommodate a hundred and fifty chickens.

It has an electric light in it which can be turned on after dark in order to increase the number of working hours of the hens, who will keep busy until it becomes dark in the chicken house.

This chicken house was a good one, situated in a grove on an estate north of Dover, on the Channel and within range of the big guns Hitler had planted

RANGERS!

by ALLAN K. ECHOLS

Author of "With Battlewagon and Bayonets," etc.



he kept it up like that, mowing down the Nazis!

Here was the danger area, the invasion beachhead, the logical stretch for the Allies to open a second front, and Lieutenant Clay Temple, Brooklyn, U. S. A., was set to fight this big push to the finish if single-handed he had to smash to bits that solid mass of Hun shore gun emplacements, barbed wire, minefields, pillboxes, and roving tanks!

along the invasion coast in France. And like all good chicken houses, it had a light burning in it after dark. But there weren't any laying hens in it.

The roosts were occupied by ten men who sat at ease listening to a man who was talking to them from his seat on a fifty-gallon corrugated zinc garbage

BIG THRILLING NOVEL OF THE SECOND FRONT AND A BATTLE-

TOUGHENED YANK NAZI BOMBS AND BULLETS COULDN'T STOP!

can full of laying mash.

The men sitting on the roosts were clad in loose-fitting coveralls of a solid black color covered with big patch pockets and gadgets like belt loops, on which could be hung fence-cutting pliers, hand grenades, pistol holsters—or a number of deadly things. They wore high laced tennis shoes. There were no insignia of rank nor organization on them. Under these clothes they wore French peasant pants and blouses. These peasant clothes were cheap and well-worn, and safety pins did duty in places of missing buttons.

Lieutenant Clay Temple was also in these black coveralls and there was no insignia on the garment. On the chickenhouse wall back of him he had sketched a rough map, showing a point of land marked England on the left, separated by a stretch of water from a coastline on the right, marked from top to bottom, Netherlands, Belgium and Occupied France.

Pointing to the map with the piece of blue crayon with which he had hastily sketched it, he said, "Here's our job, men. From here to Dunkirk is less than thirty miles, and from the French coast inland for another thirty miles there is a solid mass of pillboxes, artillery emplacements, minefields and barbed wire. Back of this are the German airfields. This area is the danger spot to the Germans because it is the logical point for opening a second front, being so close to the English coast, and within range of our own shore-based guns at some points.

"Now naturally the Germans are thick in here, and keep everything and everybody under iron control. But in spite of their watchfulness we have contacts there, and the villagers are only waiting for the big day when we land in force. They have been organized secretly among themselves, men, women and children alike.

"The British have been making a small machinegun which costs only eight dollars—making it by the hundreds of thousands. And it is made to use *German* ammunition! These guns are to go to the French citizens to be used on Invasion Day."

Instinctively, Sergeant Fatso Zimmer said, "I get it, Cap. Every Heine a Frenchman snipes yields a lot of ammunition and another gun, and that multiplies so the more Heines killed the better the Froggie is armed. He can build up a guerrilla army, storm ammunition dumps and put a gun in the hands of every Frenchman on the coast, and turn the Heine's own guns and ammunition back on them."

Temple grinned at the top-kick. "Fine, Fatso. You'll be showing almost human intelligence next. That's the story, men. But—the Germans know what's going on under their noses and they're jittery as hell. They've been rounding up suspected guerrillas by the hundreds. And accidentally, they got their hands on the one man on the Invasion Coast that we can't afford to let 'em have.

"He's an inconspicuous peasant farmer named Andre Ruen, but he's the heart and lifeblood of the underground army. He's turned out to be a kind of spiritual leader and organizing genius, and there's not another Frenchman there who is valuable to us as he is—alive. Dead or in prison, which means the same thing, the whole French underground organization is likely to break down—just when we are ready to strike."

"So what do we do?" Fatso asked. "Just go over and ask the Krauts to give him back to us?"

"Right again," Clay Temple beamed. "This Ruen was picked up somewhere around the village of St. Omar. That's all we know. We've got to start from there, find him and set him free if he

is alive. As soon as we've got him, there'll be several barge loads of these little machineguns crossing the channel, and we'll deliver them to him. That's all we have to do. Any questions?"

"Yes," Fatso said. "Hadn't I better hustle up some split cane?"

"Why?"

"So we could get in a little basket weaving in our spare time."

A POOR chicken house is small and dark and has poor ventilation. This was a poor chicken house situated in the edge of a grove of chestnut trees on a tiny farm back of St. Omar. It was dark and smelled like a chicken house, but there were no chickens in it.

It was crowded. In the darkness, Lieutenant Clay Temple talked in undertones to the squad of men who had dropped silently out of a British bomber, had landed in the stubblefield on the farm of Peter Ruen, had picked up their gear which had followed them to earth under other chutes, and had gathered here in the night.

Peter Ruen was short and his clothes indicated he had once been fat, but that was before the Germans had robbed the countryside of its food. His face was lined, and his clothes were shabby and hung loosely on him.

"My brother Andre disappeared three nights ago, after he had left the tavern outside St. Omar. He had gone there to see what he could learn. There is a German who claims he is an American who bought the tavern several years ago, although a Frenchman claims to own it. They serve German officers, and such of us Frenchmen as can afford to buy a drop of wine there."

"Yes," Temple answered. "We got that through your radio, as well as the names of all the Frenchmen suspected of selling information to the Germans. They have not yet found your radio?"

"No," Ruen answered. "It is hidden in my cheese cave, where you can hide when you are not busy. They'll never find you there—"

"I want them to find me," Temple said. "That is my plan. This General von Krock, as I understand it, knows that every loyal Frenchman on the coast would risk his life to kill him on sight."

"Oui." The peasant made a wry face. "He is clever—and cruel. With him out of the way, half our battle would be won. But—" he shrugged, "he knows that, and he is never seen."

"I see," Temple answered. "In that case, my first job is to find von Krock. make him free your brother, and either take von Krock prisoner or kill him."

"But that is impossible. No one ever knows where he is."

"That's what we're here for, to do the impossible—or at least to try it. Now here's my plan. . . ."

In the darkness of the smelly chicken house, Clay Temple outlined his plan to the Frenchmen and his own men. He finished by saying, "I know that it's desperate—a long chance, but it's the only way a handful of us stand a chance against a whole army. And remember this, men, when a man is wounded he must be considered dead by the rest of us. We can't stop to help him, but have to keep at the job assigned to us. That's all."

"What are we waiting for?" Fatso Zimmer asked. "We've been in France an hour and haven't killed a Kraut."

Les Deux Maggots was a *bistrot*, saloon, located in the corner of a cross-roads just outside of St. Omar. In the night it appeared as a mysterious dark blot under a group of towering chestnut trees, a blot of blackness broken only by a pair of blue lights at its entrance door. There were no lights at its windows, but the sound of merriment came

from the interior.

A dozen dark figures approached the place on silent feet, and within fifty feet of the blue lights they separated. Three of the figures made their way boldly toward the lights, and the leader knocked.

Before an answer could come, a figure with a bayoneted gun materialized out of the darkness and a German voice halted them. "Who are you?" the sentry demanded.

Clay Temple answered in provincial French, and the sentry approached him and with gun gripped alertly, he stuck his face up close to that of Temple, to examine him by the dim blue light.

Two silent hands came from behind the sentry, steel strong fingers gripped his neck and tightened like a vise. Only a slight gurgle escaped the sentry's throat as he was dragged back into the darkness. There was the sound of snapping bone, just a slight sound, and the sentry lay dead with a broken neck.

The door had opened a crack, and just as the sentry died, Clay Temple stuck a coarse shoe into the opening—and he and two other men pushed their way into the lighted interior. "It's all right," Temple said in French. "We're expected here."

Temple and the two sergeants, Fatso Zimmer and Slug Carson, stood within the door while their eyes adjusted to the dim inside lights. Clad in poor peasant garments, they made a trio which quickly caught the eyes of those in the room, and brought a sudden hush.

TEMPLE was of medium height and his appearance wouldn't have been outstanding except for the square cut of his jaw and something about his eyes. There was a steady fearless look about them which was far different from the haunted, whipped and secretive look of the Frenchmen in the

place—the sullen looks of conquered people—and of treacherous people.

Fatso Zimmer was misnamed. Although he weighed more than two hundred pounds, it wasn't fat but muscle which tipped the scales. A lot of waterfront bullies in Brooklyn had learned that too late.

Slug Carson looked his name. His flattened nose and cauliflower ears, his beefy shoulders and the general appearance of a broken down prize fighter had earned him a fine living in Hollywood, and he had a nice small stock ranch in the hills where he raised guinea pigs and white mice for medical laboratories. His wife and daughter were running it now.

The three of them in their peasant costumes might have passed for peasants for a moment in a bad light—but not for long.

Temple's sharp eyes made a quick survey of the French bar, resting a short instant on a group of three German officers in *feldgrau* uniforms who sat at a table with an iced bottle of Champagne beside it. They were arrogant in bearing, smartly tailored, and their eyes were coldly cynical. Their conversation was in undertones.

Temple's eyes flashed on past them as he saw that they looked up and studied his party carefully. Other officers at other tables did not notice the newcomers.

Temple went over toward the bar, flanked by Zimmer and Carson. A group of men, evidently small French business men, were standing there drinking. One of them was saying in a loud voice:

"I suppose Andre Ruen has learned by now that it is unwise to be too wise," he laughed.

"Yes," another answered. "He did not realize that the Germans are our only friends, that the English hated and betrayed us."

"Besides that," the third added. "Imagine a poor peasant like him thinking he was smart enough to organize an underground army under von Krock's very nose without being found out. Impossible! Fool—"

The speaker stopped abruptly as his neighbor nudged him, jerking his head in the direction of the three newcomers. He finished whatever he had to say in an undertone.

The bartender was a big blondish man with bleached face and hair, and blank pale blue eyes. He came over and swabbed the bar as he looked at the three intruders. There was a suspicious silence in the smoky room.

"Champagne," Temple said casually.

The bartender looked startled. "*Vermouth d'eau*, you will get," he answered. "That will be Franks fifteen."

Temple pulled out a roll of German invasion money and spread it out on the bar. "I said Champagne."

The bartender looked at him sneeringly. "Are you a stranger around here? There is no Champagne." He shoved a bottle of vermouth across the bar.

Temple turned and looked at the German officers who were pouring drinks from their bottle. The bartender had placed three large glasses in front of them, and a bottle of soda water, and a one-ounce measuring glass with which they were to measure out an ounce of vermouth for each glass, and fill it up with soda.

Temple filled the three large glasses with vermouth, and the three men drank them down. The bartender yelled, "Here, that is—"

Temple interrupted him. "This is the *Bistrot* of Henri Duval, *ne'est pas?*"

"Oui. *Porque—*"

"I wish to speak with him."

"He is not here. What do you want?"

"He is the man, is he not, who buys

and sells information for the *cochons* who have invaded our country?"

The bartender's face went scarlet. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that I am looking for the man who betrays his France to the Germans for money, Monsieur Henri Duval. I want to give him information to deliver to von Krock."

"I do not know what you mean—"

TEMPLE changed suddenly from French to English. "Listen, Mac," he said. "You're a lug named Mueller from Milwaukee. You went back to Germany before the war, and were sent here before the Germans came, to make contact with somebody who would sell out to them. Duval was your man. Now I want to get in touch with von Krock through him."

The bartender's eyes became veiled. "Yeah? And who are you?"

"Just a guy that's got a message for von Krock."

"I don't think he'd be interested in buying any information from anybody from America."

"I don't want to *sell* it to him. I want your boss Duval to *give* it to him."

"And what is this message?"

"The message is this, I want him to be told that he had better select his pallbearers—because an American named Temple is here to kill him. Get it?"

Temple was watching the backbar mirror. Flanking him, the two sergeants enjoyed their vermouth, apparently noticing nothing.

The bartender's mouth went hard. "Yank, you'd better watch your yap around here. Now pay me for that extra liquor you drank—"

"I'll give you back the liquor," Temple said.

He lifted his glass and sent the contents into the bartender's face. The

man sputtered and wiped his burning eyes.

"You crazy pig," he blurted, and his hand came up from behind the bar with a heavy stick used for pounding cracked ice around beer kegs. As he raised it, Clay Temple picked up the vermouth bottle and cracked him over the head with it. The bartender fell down into a tray of wine glasses and dragged them down to the floor with him where they fell with a crash.

Then Temple swung the bottle again and crashed it against the backbar mirror, and the whole thing came down with a deafening clatter.

The three French civilians beside Temple turned and chattered in French. "Kill this fool—"

That was as far as their party got into the argument. Fatso Zimmer and Slug Carson made hash out of them in ten seconds and left them stunned on the floor. Then they turned and watched the German officers.

A short, stout man with a ruddy face, a walrus mustache and a bald pate came out of a rear door beside the bar. His little eyes were peering out of layers of fat as he took in the sight of the wrecked *Bistrot* in one glance.

"*Gendarme — gendar—*" he was clawing for a police whistle.

But Temple was at his side. "Never mind, Henri, you won't need them. We're going for a walk. I came all the way from England just to see you, *ami*."

"England?" The Frenchman's mustaches quivered.

"You guessed it, friend. Commandos—Rangers—whatever. Let's go!"

Behind Temple's back the three young German officers had sat toying with their Champagne glasses, watching the peasant squabble with faintly amused smiles. Now they seemed to think it had gone far enough.

One of them looked at the others

with a smile on his monocled face, then casually drew his Luger. It was like a little drunken game. He looked at the gun, released the safety with his thumb, then braced it across his left wrist, letting the barrel drop squarely toward the middle of Temple's back. His two friends turned to see how good his shot would be.

A shot rang out in the smoky room—but it didn't come from the German's gun. Fatso Zimmer with a Colt Automatic miraculously in his hand, leaned back against the bar and shot the German officer square through the eye containing the monocle! Most of the glass was driven into his brain along with the lead slug.

Now realizing the seriousness of the affair, the two other Germans shouted and clawed for their guns.

Temple shouted, too. "Don't kill 'em, Fat. I need 'em!"

Fatso shot the gun out of the hand of the first one of them, while Slug Carson slid across the room with his own gun drawn and extracted the second officer's weapon from his hand just as he got it out of its black leather holster.

Temple addressed the pair in German while his sergeants kept them covered. "I'm taking one of you. The other one is to go to his headquarters and report that I sent this message to von Krock. Tell him an American Ranger lieutenant sends him word that he is personally a coward, and that he had better pack up the whole German army and head back home unless he wants me and half a dozen of my friends to destroy them all. He will laugh at that. Then tell him I said to watch and see what happens. I'll be the one who is doing that. You with the wounded hand, you can be the messenger. Fatso, bring the other one along."

"What will we do with this French

traitor?" Slug asked. "Conk him?"

"No. Bring him along, too. He knows things about the spy setup."

"Boy! Would I like to question him—with a few left hooks to the jaw."

"I think his neighbors can handle him."

THE Frenchman's face went white. "If I am a prisoner of war," he said excitedly, "then take me back to England with you. There is no need to take me anywhere else."

"Why? Afraid of your neighbors?"

"They wouldn't give me a fair chance."

"—like you gave those you betrayed?"

"Come on," Temple said. "We've got work to do."

The three Americans pushed their two captives through the door and out into the silent darkness. Temple whistled when they had got out of earshot of the tavern, and the men he had posted around the building gathered under the shadows of a giant chestnut tree. Temple called to Peter Ruen.

"I want you to take this Duval person to your cheese cave and turn him over to one of my men named Bronko Wolowski. Get a few of your friends to hear what Duval says. Wolowski will know ways of making him talk, and he will make Duval reveal the names of all other Frenchmen associated with him in giving information to the Germans. After you have pumped him dry, I hope your friends will know how to deal with him and the others. But do it quickly! We can't afford to have loose tongues around tonight."

"Leave that to us, Mons. Lieutenant. He has betrayed us to death. But these men are only a small part of our troubles, small grapes, as we say. How are you to find von Krock? He goes everywhere, and in secret. You could

not locate him—"

"Ah, you are right." I could not find him. So—I will make him look for me. I intend to raise so much hell here in the next few hours that he will be convinced that he personally is the only man who can cope with me. He will *want* to meet me face to face."

As Ruen and his three French friends led the traitor off into the darkness, Fatso dragged the German officer forward with a hand in his collar, and he was quickly surrounded by the four of Temple's men remaining.

Temple addressed him in German. "We are not here to take prisoners," he snapped. "There are thousands of lives involved here—and your one little life is not worth five minutes of our time. So, if you want to live to walk *Unter den Linden* after the war, you will answer correctly the first time. You will be held until your information is verified—and if it is wrong—your death will not be painless. Do you understand that you have only one chance to answer correctly and live?"

"Ja. But I will not answer."

"Kill him, Fatso. And make it hurt. We haven't time to argue with him."

Zimmer caught the man by the back of the neck with one hand, and stuck the stiffened first two fingers of his other hand into the man's eyes like the tines of a carving fork going into a turkey. He twisted the rigid fingertips against the man's eyeballs—and the man tried to scream.

Zimmer's hand dropped to the man's throat and cut off the scream.

"Ready to talk?" he asked.

"Ja. Don't torture me—I'll talk."

Temple asked. "Where is von Krock's secret headquarters when he is here in St. Omar?"

"In the house which was formerly occupied by the mayor."

"Mike, tell Pete to ask somebody in the cheese cave if this might be right."

Mike Peroni and his brother Pete were "The Twins," two identical twins who were the radio operators of this expedition. Of Italian-American extraction, they were so much alike in appearance that even the men in their own squad were unable to tell them apart.

Mike was with Temple now, carrying and operating a "walkie-talkie" radio set, hardly larger than a lunch box, and carried by a strap around his neck, like a radio announcer's portable set for broadcasting sports events. Pete was back in the chese cave with a receiver and a heavier portable set with which he could also keep in contact with their headquarters in England.

Mike got his reply. "Somebody there says that the mayor has been missing for months, and that Germans are occupying his house."

Temple called Joe Bettles the cotton farmer. "Take this German to the cave and hold him. If he has lied I'll send you word to kill him. All right, the rest of you. Let's go. Fatso, bring the Molotov cocktails."

THEY had just gathered up their gear and started out toward the road when the sound of a motor siren cut the night, and the two blue headlights of a scout car rolled up to the darkened tavern. A squad of eight helmeted figures started piling out.

"We'll ride to town," Temple announced. "Slug, you and Fatso give them a few squirts from your choppers. Save the leader for me."

There were four of them now slipping through the darkness toward the car at the entrance of the *Bistrot*. They got to within ten feet when Temple said, "All right."

The officer in charge of the squad had his hand on the door when two machine guns cut loose with a wild clatter. Fatso and Slug, on opposite sides, con-

verged, spraying lead from Tommy-guns, tracer bullets guiding their aim.

The German officer yelled and clawed for his pistol, but his men were dead before he got it out—and Temple was by his side with his own gun at the man's chest. "Come along," he said in French. "*Pour vous le guerre est fini!* For you, the war is finished!"

"Who are you?" the German demanded.

"We're the party you are going to lead to the nearest listening tower."

"*Nein!*" the German snapped.

Temple did not argue. With his left hand he took a pair of fence pliers out of the ample pockets of his coveralls and caught the lobe of the man's ear between their serrated teeth. As he tightened his grip, blood spurted from the bursting tender flesh.

"I will turn your ear loose when we get to the listening tower," he said, and yanked the man toward the scout car.

His ear twisted and bleeding, the pliers still chewing into the tender flesh even as he was shoved into the car, the German quickly capitulated and indicated the direction and Fatso drove the car.

The nearest listening tower was atop a two-story residence in the edge of town, surrounded by residences of the better sort. Atop the building were clusters of giant horns like those of old-fashioned phonographs, highly sensitive receivers which could pick up the drone of airplane motors a hundred miles away, and by being revolved in pairs, could identify the direction from which they were coming.

These listeners were manned twenty-four hours a day, and accompanied by installations of powerful sirens and radio sets with which to spread the alarm.

They stopped their motor a good distance from the house, killed their unwilling guide, and went forward on foot until they were close enough to

see the moving figures of sentries who moved slowly around it with bayoneted guns on their shoulders.

"I think this is a knife job," Temple said in an undertone. "We've got to get inside without warning. Mike, when we get in, you head for the sirens and turn them full on. Fatso, you destroy the rest of the gear. Slug and I will cover you."

Temple went openly forward toward the front door of the house where a sentry stood with gun at present arms, while the other three slipped around to the rear. He waited in the shadows within fifteen feet of the man. Finally he saw Fatso approaching from around the left hand side, and he knew that one of the sentries had died silently.

Then Slug came around from the right, while Mike stayed at the rear. And now Temple acted. He took a hatchet out of his belt.

He might have been a Chinese hatchetman, for all his accuracy! He threw the hatchet with the aim of a big league baseball pitcher—straight at the face of the man in front of the door.

The heavy instrument made one complete revolution around its handle as it whistled through the air, and its razor sharp blade cleft the German's face and forehead with the clean slice of a butcher's cleaver. The man slipped to the floor with a thump and died like a slaughterhouse steer.

Fatso and Slug followed Temple who had reached the door on silent feet, and they hurdled the dead sentry and went into the lighted hallway without the need of words. Up the stairs in single file with tommy guns cradled, and into the front room, where electrical apparatus cluttered a lot of pine tables.

Four Germans, two with earphones on their heads, turned in startled amazement at this intrusion, saw the faces of the intruders and set up a shout

while they reached for guns. Two of the men grabbed for warning switches on the table.

Fatso and Slug gave them two tiny squirts from the tommy guns. The room clattered for only a second, but four dead Germans slumped to the floor as Mike Peroni came in from the rear, wiping German blood off the blade of his dagger onto his black coveralls.

He looked over the apparatus carefully identifying each piece, then he closed a knife switch. Immediately the night was cut by the screech of a group of sirens, their screams so ear-piercing in their intensity that they brought agony to the eardrums.

MIKE dropped into a chair, one foot resting on a dead German on the floor, and slapped a pair of earphones to his ears just as German voices came through them.

In answer, he reported in German that he had picked up the sounds of heavy motors approaching from the West. Indicated as between a hundred and a hundred-fifty heavy bombers from due West, and an equal number from northwest, while an unidentified number were approaching from the southwest.

Suddenly the whole coast changed from dark silence to a living bedlam. Searchlights split the sky, visible for miles, weaving and flashing in giant arcs, like a Hollywood premier magnified a million times. As far as the eye could see northward and southward, and eastward toward the coast, these brilliant cones of light shot ten miles upward.

The screech of the siren atop the house sheltering the four Americans was picked up by other sirens, and still others gave birth to their screeching alert.

Anti-aircraft batteries fired test bursts of tracers and ordinary living

shells into the air, checking their weapons. Flaming onions whistled upward, burst into that strange greenish-yellow light and floated eerily above the mad, frightened countryside.

The four men wrecked the apparatus, set fire to the house, and went outside into what had been quiet darkness, but which now resembled nothing as much as a scene from *Inferno*. The scream of *alerte* up and down the coast, sirens on patrol and scout cars, the bursts of ack-ack, the floating meteors of white starshells floated across the black sky at forty thousand feet, like lost heavenly bodies, all these deafening screams and roars, these stuttering rataplans of testing batteries, these blinding lights which made the mysterious darkness more pronounced . . . these things brought hell to the Invasion coast.

Fatso said, "Mike, it looks like you sure turned loose half-acre of hell with one little electric switch. That'll keep 'em awake for a while."

Temple had been watching quietly. "That's the idea. This is just the beginning, and it's going to be a long time before anybody in these parts gets another good night's sleep."

"Just for fun," Slug said. "Tell me what good it does to set off a false alarm like this."

Temple felt a tingle of excitement as he stood watching the hell in the night. "Not that it matters, but this might be the beginning of the end of Hitler's dream of being another Ghengis Khan. You see, if we get the breaks, we're the first of the Invasion force. I mean it, just this little handful of us can start the big ball rolling."

"No kiddin'," Fatso said. "Are we gonna chase von Krock out of France by ourselves?"

"It's like a snowball," Temple explained. "Let's head for von Krock's headquarters, and I'll tell you guys how. Mike, get your walkie-talkie."

As the car pulled down the street passing other screaming cars, Temple explained, "The German army didn't whip the French army in a head-on combat. What happened was that by their lightning tactics they were able first to completely destroy the communications between the French armies and their headquarters, whose business it is to do the planning. The result was that the armies weren't armies any longer, but just mobs of men, each doing what it thought best. Nobody knew what was best to do, and so they did practically nothing."

"So we're going to deprive the Germans of von Krock?" Fatso said.

"That's thinking," Temple laughed. "You'll be a general in another thousand years. You see, this defense area has to wait for the Allied move before they know who or what they're facing, and they have to make their plans after we attack. Von Krock is the German master mind who will make the defense plans—if he's still alive and free—it's our job to see that he's not."

"I still don't see the effectiveness of this false alarm."

Their car was moving down a tree-lined street now, with Fatso at the wheel.

"To create confusion. We've got a complicated job to do, and the confusion helps us. Briefly, here's what we've got to do. Create so damned much hell here that von Krock comes rushing in to take personal charge. We grab him and anybody close to him, and we've got the brains of the German army in our hands. Find the missing Ruen and free him to take charge of the French bunch, supply them with the machine guns which are following us over here, and let the French add their own two-cents worth of hell to the situation. The German troops will now have their hands full trying to quell a thousand little disturbances, not

knowing where they will break out next—and having no centralized command to guide them. If we get the breaks, kill enough high officers and wreck their radio systems, this whole shore should be a madhouse in nothing flat. And then—payday. *Les Americaines est aqui!* There'll be half a million Allied troops here before Berlin knows what happened. It's big—and we're the key logs of the jam right now."

SLUG whistled. "You mean actually that the Allied command is depending on just us as to whether they start the big push? Just us?"

"Don't let your head get too big, but that's a fact."

"And if we flop?"

"Somebody else will come over and try again. The capture of von Krock in person is the key that unlocks the works. Are we going to be the lucky birds that get him?"

"Not 'we'—me!" Fatso contributed as he jammed the brakes on the car.

A full line of gray clad Germans with bayonets blocked off the street at the corner of the block in which the General's headquarters were situated.

An officer with a flashlight in one hand and a pistol in the other approached the car. Temple said in an undertone, "When I grab him, throw the car in high, Fatso. Slug, you and Mike dust off the guards."

"*Halten!*" The German officer followed his command by stepping up onto the runningboard and throwing the flashlight into the face of Fatso at the wheel.

Suddenly Temple darted up from his seat behind Fatso, got a strangle hold on the officer and shouted. "Scram."

Fatso shot the car forward through the line, while Slug and Mike poured out streams of machine gun fire up and down the line of startled German

guards. The car bumped over the fallen bodies of two men and shot down the block.

Temple dragged the struggling German into the rear of the car, slugged him until he dropped his gun, and then with his iron fingers buried in the man's throat, demanded in German; "What's the password of the day?"

The German gurgled and spat at his captor. Temple twisted the knuckle of his forefinger in the man's eye and rotated it. "What's the word?"

"*Maedchen!*"

"*Maedchen.* You lechers would. wouldn't you? I'm sorry, *Fridolin*, but it's your life or a million of ours. You've got five seconds to 'Heil Hitler.' One—two—three—four—five. . . ." Temple's pistol cracked dully against the man's uniform, and the gray body fell out of the speeding car and rolled over into the gutter.

Temple cursed. "I'll never feel clean again—but it's kill or get killed."

"I ain't got so many scruples," Fatso shouted over his shoulder. "I figure them *Fridolins* believe what Hitler told 'em about their ruling the world, so I don't consider 'em any more human than a poisonous snake that would bite me if I didn't get him first. Thinking like they do, the only good German is a dead German—and I'll make as many of 'em good as I can get my hands on. It ain't a war to them, it's a personal butchering party, and they love the blood—as long as it ain't theirs."

CHAPTER II

C'EST LA VRAI GUERRE!

THE last of a stream of cars had just pulled out through the gates of a large villa situated in the center of a vast lawn in the middle of the block. The villa was lit up, and there

was the low hum of motors which fed a radio tower erected in the back yard.

Fatso pulled into the driveway, hubbing the fender of the last car going out with a group of officers in it. Temple grabbed Mike's machine gun and sprayed them with it. All the officers died. The runaway car didn't turn into the road, but ran squarely across it and crashed into the front veranda of the house across the street.

Fire broke out and started licking at the house.

"On around to that tower in the back yard."

Fatso pulled the car up at the base of the tower, and Slug shot four guards who patrolled around it.

As the car stopped the four of them hit the ground together, and with the precision of a drill team, they were all bringing small demolition bombs out of canvas bags hanging from their shoulders at the same time. In less than a minute and a half one of these bombs was attached to each of the four legs of the steel tower, and their detonators set for ten seconds. In another second they were hanging on to the car while Fatso scooted it into reverse and backed it around to the front of the house, thus putting the building between themselves and the explosions.

The sound of TNT bombs, and the rending crash of the falling tower were deafening now—and more so because there had come a sudden silence all over the countryside as the *fin d'alarme*, "end of alarm" sounded, and the searchlights went dark and the larger sirens became silent. Somebody, somewhere, had discovered that the alarm was false.

They had dropped off the car as they heard the rush of feet moving from the house, out toward the rear of the building, as Germans went to investigate. "That'll draw the guards away for a minute," Temple said. "We'll crash

the front door. You men know von Krock's looks by the pictures you've studied, as well as the looks of most of his higher officers. Don't kill Krockie, or any of the big shots whose faces you recognize, but give it to anybody else—and the bigger they are the better! Scrambo, men!"

Inside the door, Temple, who was leading, threw his hatchet at the only guard in the hall, and buried the weapon head-deep in the man's guts. As the man tumbled forward, Temple grabbed the body, retrieved his faithful hatchet, and grabbed the man's automatic rifle. He crushed the man's head with it to insure quiet.

"Take the rooms to the left, Fatso and Mike. Come with me, Slug."

Separating, they worked through room after room toward the rear of the ground floor, and then up a broad rear stairs to the second floor. There were offices downstairs, and they found nobody, but upstairs they found six high officers—and six French girls who were helping to lighten their burdens while they were so far from home.

Old von Krock must be away," Fatso grinned, "judging by the way his mice are playing."

"Come here, you," Temple said to one of the officers. "Your name is Lieutenant General Webber? Aide to von Krock?"

The lean German, dressed in striped silk pajamas, and wearing a monocle, puffed on a cigarette in a long holder and looked insolently at Temple, who was a sorry figure in his peasant garb, commanding no respect from the German. "Who are you, and how did you get into here?" barked the general.

"I just used the word 'maedchen' and the doors flew open. Quite a magic word around here, I see."

General Webber shouted loudly for the guard, but no guard came. Temple gave him a minute to realize that help

was not yet here, then said, "We tried to awaken you. Didn't you hear our firecrackers out back? Most of your men are probably out there looking for us. So—if you don't mind—come along before they return."

"Fool! You will be shot for this—"

"But I might shoot you first."

"Shoot, you fool. You won't dare do it." Webber blew smoke in Temple's face. Fatso doubled up a ham of a fist, and cursed.

Temple said, "Wait, Fatso. He's right. I can't shoot him. I need him—to lead us to von Krock. Come on, Webber."

"I will not move. Who are you?"

"Americans. Commandos, Rangers—whatever you like. But you're going with us—and quickly. Slug, convince him we're in a hurry."

Slug Carson hit the general in the jaw and knocked him unconscious. "Now the rest of you line up," Temple said. "You girls had better go home and try to explain your actions to your parents and neighbors. They're dying, you know, on account of these men you're hanging out with."

There was a big dynamo and motor, and a group of wet cell storage batteries in one of the rooms downstairs, and in the adjoining one, there was the radio apparatus.

MIKE did the whole works up brown with a TNT bomb for each room, and a thermite incendiary to set fire to, and finish off the whole building.

As they went out the front, Slug carrying the unconscious general, and Fatso escorting the rest ahead of him at the point of his weapon, Temple had grabbed a large map off the wall and was studying it quickly. He creased it carefully, wet the creased edge and tore it along the crease, then stuck both parts in his pocket.

Suddenly he stopped. "There ought

to be an emergency siren," he said. "Wait a minute."

He dashed back into the house, and in a moment there came from somewhere down by the barns the renewed screech of an *alerte* siren. He had found a switch alongside a desk he suspected was used by von Krock when he was here.

Once again the night was made hideous as other sirens took up the *alerte* and as again the powerful searchlights streaked through the black sky. The very air for miles around was quivering with tension, and the flack guns, their crews now more nervous and apprehensive, took up the warning and sent shells aloft to join the rockets, from pure nervousness it seemed. For there was no enemy aircraft in sight. Jumpy nerves had to get relief somehow—and the whole coast was jumpy—even the air was jumpy. Terror bred more terror, and anything was better than just sitting and waiting. The night was fast becoming a living hell!

So—sirens screamed, squad cars darted here and there with horns blaring, the searchlights jumped and darted and starshells lit the sky for five miles straight up. Dark figures on the streets scurried to shelters, guns went off in dark places. Doors slammed and window shutters banged, and people crouched in their houses. There was no rest for anybody!

Half a dozen fires started in the darked-out town, and the clang of fire apparatus and the screams of their horns added to the din—and to the terror. Nobody could sleep—or even relax in this horrible inferno.

"You like to play with those big whistles, don't you?" Fatso said as they pushed the car out of the mayor's yard just ahead of a hail of bullets from soldiers running around from the rear of the house. "I bet you kept your folks awake nights when you were a

kid."

"This is business," Temple said. "Turn out to the bistro again. I want to have a quiet little talk with the gent in the striped pajamas, and I want to be far out enough so nobody will hear him yell."

"If I am a prisoner of war," the general said in English, "then I—"

"I know. You expect to be treated like one. But you see, I'm on my own, and I've never read the Hague Treaty. I understand that you're the man who ordered the terror bombing of Warsaw—so you ought to be able to understand what I'm going to do to you."

"I'm not interested in understanding you. You may shoot me now and save yourself time, if that's your idea."

"No, you've got me licked there. I can't shoot you—because I need you alive. But—chum—I can make you wish I had shot you."

The car pulled up in the deserted chestnut forest alongside the Duval bistro, and they got out.

"Here's a job for you, Fatso and Slug." He took one half of the torn map out of his pocket, and threw a flashlight on it. "This has the locations of every listening tower, every ammunition and supply dump, gas dump, and radio station from St. Omar to the coast. I want you to start at the nearest point and blow the living hell out of them one after another."

"I'm going to like this," Fatso beamed. "I always had a streak of pyromaniac in me anyway. When do we start?"

Temple's face was grave as he turned to the little group of prisoners. "We can't risk leaving these men alive. They've the brains of the whole German occupation force. And we've got nobody to guard them."

"I get it," Fatso said. "Line 'em up and give them a minute to pray."

"I want Webber," Temple said.

Then he turned to the men. "I'm sorry, but this is your war, and this is the way you play it. May God have more mercy on you than I can find in my heart for you."

The men stood erect, insolent, as Slug lined them up. They saluted Webber, whom Temple kept beside him. "Heil Hitler," came from their lips. . . . Fatso's machine gun clattered. . . .

Webber puffed at his cigarette and watched coldly on his colleagues, friends of many years, toppled to the ground.

"You might just as well have killed me, too," Webber said. "I assure you that I'm too much of a soldier to be of any help to you."

"I don't doubt your ability to die like a soldier. But I'm going to find out about your ability to take what you give." Temple turned to Fatso. "You boys scram, and every time the sirens stop, find another alarm station and start them up again. I don't want anybody going to sleep on us tonight. I'll meet you back at the cheese cave."

FATSO and Slug gathered new supplies from the pile they had hidden in the grove, and set out in the German scout car. Temple turned to Webber.

"You people are great admirers of the Japanese, aren't you?"

"They are our allies and friends."

"Then I could do no better than to copy the morals of your friends." Temple had his pliers out, and now with a quick grab, he caught Webber's wrist. He opened the pliers and caught Webber's little finger between their steel jaws, and tightened up on them. "This is one of your Jap friends' methods of interviewing prisoners," he said. "So I am sure you don't disapprove of it in principle. Now, the first question—"

Webber's face went white, and per-

spiration ran down his forehead and dripped off his chin, but his mouth remained closed.

"Your intelligence has picked up a Frenchman named Ruen, and has him imprisoned somewhere. I want that man, and I'm going to destroy every German installation and kill every German on this coast if I don't get him. That's clear enough for you to understand. Now—the question: Where is he?"

Webber did not answer. "The tips of the finger are sensitive, aren't they? That's probably due to the many tactile nerve endings in them. Let's try another one—the bone might crush more easily."

Webber's jaws tightened, his eyes bulged, and sweat dripped from his quivering jowls. Mike Peroni, standing behind Temple, said, "Jeez, Lieutenant," and got sick at his stomach.

Temple was sweating. He released the German's hand. "Mister," he said, "I respect you as a man—but I've got a job to do. It's either you or a million of my people. You are thinking that we Americans are soft, and that I won't be able to stand this as long as you can. But you're wrong. I don't like it—but I'm going to torture you to death or make you talk. I'm not fooling, and I have little time."

"I have come to the conclusion that you are a fool," Webber said. "You are trying the impossible. But I also conclude that because you cannot do anything about it, I can still with honor, answer your question."

"Always proving you are right," Temple said. "But talk."

"The man you mention is head of the group of Frenchmen who are disloyal to the Petain government—"

"Meaning, men who are loyal to France—"

"Traitors to Laval and to us who would lead them into a new and better

world. But this traitor is done for. He is being questioned by General von Krock himself, tonight at midnight, in his headquarters at Calais. And it is utterly impossible for you to do anything about it, since you could not get there before he is tried and shot. Nor could a company or even a division of your men get to him if you were storming the very doors of Calais."

"Maybe not a division, nor a regiment—but I'll undertake to do the job single-handed," Temple answered eagerly. "There are a lot of things individuals can do which an army couldn't do. Thanks."

"What are you going to do with him, Lieutenant?" Mike asked.

"Call Pete at the cave, and have him tell Wolowski that the man who butchered Poland will be tied to a tree here, and to come out and get him and—we'll let him decide. After all, Bronko had brothers and sisters in Warsaw."

LEAVING Webber tied to the tree, Temple turned on his flashlight and studied the detail map of the coast which had been furnished him by Intelligence before he left England. Von Krock's Calais headquarters, and other German installations and focal points had been marked, and all information gathered by loyal French spies noted.

Then Temple groaned. He had sent the boys away with the squad car, and in this deserted edge of the town there was little likelihood of finding one which he could commandeer. But he had to have a car—and in a hurry!

Suddenly he got a bright idea.

He threw an explosive bomb through the window into the bistrot of the traitor, Duval, and when the mighty explosion reduced the roadhouse to wreckage, he added an incendiary bomb to it, and converted it into a huge bonfire. Then he topped it off

with three more ear-shattering bombs in rapid succession. Thus he put on an excellent imitation of a minor outbreak.

He hid in the woods and waited. In five minutes four German squad cars loaded with riflemen and machine guns came screaming up to the scene, and the men piled out and rushed toward the flaming building. "Thanks, boy, Temple grinned. He brought out his little canvas bag of deadly playthings, dumped them into the foremost of the cars, ducked into it and ground the gears as the car shot down the street.

He heard shouts, and the clatter of rifles behind him as his trick was discovered, but he jammed his foot on the gas and pushed forward. The officer in charge of the men was smart, for he seemed to quickly scent that this business was a blind, and that the source of the trouble was the man in the stolen car. Two of the remaining squad cars were refilled quickly with men, and set out in pursuit of him.

Temple left the driving lights off and tooled forward in the darkness, taking turns at dark corners with hair raising speed, skidding through alleys and turning back on his tracks. He circled one block, cut across two vacant lots to another street which was broad and paved. He followed this half a mile to the Calais road intersection, turned right on two wheels, and settled down for the long trip to the coast.

He had made barely a mile when the two cars turned into the road behind him and settled down to overtake him. Their sirens screamed in one continuous blast, and occasional shots tested the distance between them and their victim. Overhead the anti-aircraft searchlights glared in moving pillars of light.

The wind whistled around Temple's ears, as he stooped forward over the wheel, his foot jammed down on the

gas, and a machine gun in the seat beside him. In the open car, he could look back and keep an eye on the blue headlamps of the two cars.

Although the distance from St. Omar to Calais was little over twenty miles by the paved highway, which he was eating up at more than a mile a minute, the time seemed interminable, for this was a strange car, and he could not get the speed out of it the Germans were getting out of theirs. They were gaining on him.

Finally when he was within five miles of the outskirts of Calais, where scattered buildings and groups of buildings became thicker, he saw that he could not outdistance them in this thickly populated territory, where the road twisted and turned, passed over salt-marsh and creek bridges and railroad viaducts.

He would have to abandon the road soon, but it occurred to him disappointingly then, that even if he escaped the men an alarm would be put out for him—and he would have little chance of success in his mission.

Then the car's engine started coughing—out of gas!

Two obstacles to his success—piling up one on the other! He was stuck here, and there were two squads of soldiers here to spread the alarm.

As the car slowed down and the engine died, he was approaching a concrete bridge over a tidewater creek, rolling downhill toward it. Along the sides of the bridge were low concrete posts with iron pipes connecting them.

Quickly Temple slung his bag of bombs over his shoulder, picked up his machine gun, and crawled out onto the runningboard of the car, guiding it with one hand.

He looked back, saw the approaching cars now less than a quarter of a mile behind him in the darkness. He twisted the steering wheel of his car sharply

and jumped just as his machine approached the bridge.

He hit the ground in a paratroopers' fall and turned two somersaults before he rolled to a stop.

The heavy scout car's front wheels twisted to the left and the car crashed into the bridge railing. It barged through the connecting pipes and its body wrapped itself around the concrete posts. The whole mess hung precariously out over the slimy water under the bridge.

TEMPLE saw the oncoming squad cars hit the bridge at seventy miles an hour—then heard their brakes screaming as the drivers saw the wreckage of their stolen vehicle.

Temple kept hidden in the gutter, crawling forward until he was at the very embankment on which the end of the bridge rested. He lay in the dark until both cars of his pursuers had stopped, backed their machines up to the bridge, and poured out their dozen occupants.

The steel-helmeted gray figures clumped around the wrecked car, and Temple heard two officers arguing as to whether he must have gone overboard into the water and drowned.

"In any event, we must report to headquarters, and then make a thorough search," one of them decided. He barked, "Take a message."

Temple froze. He knew that many of the German cars were equipped with hand power sending sets, their generators operating with hand cranks. He could not afford to let that message get through.

He gripped his machine gun, fingered the trigger, then got to his feet running. Less than fifty feet separated him from the cluster of Germans, and he could not miss.

His gun clattered and bucked in his hand, and his bullets mowed down the

Germans like wheat before a binder. He kept walking into them and their returning fire until the last man was down to stay.

Then he continued, picked up the first of the squad cars and drove into Calais.

CHAPTER III

THE FIRING SQUAD

VON KROCK'S headquarters, like the headquarters buildings at other points, was in one of the best the Germans could steal. In this case, it was the clubhouse of a Country Club, but as Temple left his car and skirted the grounds, he could see little resemblance to its former pleasant atmosphere.

There were rows of tents under the trees, a newly installed radio tower by the Provincial style clubhouse, and just back of it, a great, rambling warehouse built of hew yellow wood. Official cars were parked in front of the clubhouse, and though the windows had been darkened with blackout cloths, numerous cracks of light showed through. Uniformed men came and went in official cars with rank flags on the radiators, while armed guards were thick as flies on the grounds.

Temple had little trouble evading the men in the yard, but he saw still less chance of forcing an entrance into the building. If the French patriot were being questioned—and the thought of German methods of questioning brought a grimace to his face—if the little French peasant were being questioned, and then was to be superficially tried and shot, there seemed at first glance nothing that Temple could do to prevent it.

Keeping in the blackest shadows of the trees, he made his way around to

the rear, disheartened at the prospect. He passed within a few feet of the entrance to the big warehouse at the back, where a group of tennis courts had been. Half a dozen armed Germans stood at the open front door. He looked into the lighted interior, but could make out nothing except that what seemed acres of floor space was covered with nothing but row after row of pine boxes, stacked up to the ceiling. In the aisles, a couple of soldiers were playing with a big, friendly German police dog. It was a quiet place.

A quiet place—but with enough ammunition in it to kill an army!

He slipped back toward the rear of the clubhouse, looking up to some suggestion of a way to get into von Krock's headquarters before it was too late. If he only had help—Where was Mike?

For the first time he realized that he had been so concerned with his task that he had completely forgotten the radio operator. He hadn't thought of him since he gave him the message to send back to the cheese cave, where the rest of his crew was waiting orders. Now Temple wouldn't even be able to get in touch with them to send for help—and he needed help badly now.

It seemed that Webber was right. Temple wouldn't even be able to get into von Krock's quarters—much less find Ruen and capture von Krock. For this place was more heavily guarded than any he had found yet. An almost solid line of soldiers surrounded the building, each within sight of the other even in the darkness. There wasn't a chance in a thousand of getting through without being captured or killed instantly.

His attention was drawn by the opening of a side door, and by the light that shone out of it.

Von Krock walked out! Following him were half a dozen staff officers, and on either side, the guards stood at at-

tention, while two staff cars pulled up, preceded by motorcycles with side-cars on which were mounted machine guns, and followed by the same protection.

Temple's heart sank. The trial must be over.

He drew his pistol. He had wanted to capture von Krock and hold him pending his rescue of Ruen—but now he realized there wasn't a chance at this time. He could fire—possibly kill von Krock—at the expense of his own life.

He would have done this gladly, but he knew that to throw himself away now in the middle of his job would not accomplish his purpose, but merely destroy the whole plan.

Still—the death of von Krock would hamper the German defense effort when the Invasion force stepped ashore—and would be worth it. After all, a man only died once. He might be able to squeeze out of it—and it was worth the chance.

He flicked the safety off his weapon.

Then another sound halted him. From the rear door which had opened while he was watching von Krock, there emerged a party of men. And Temple, seeing it by the dim light pouring out of the open door, held his breath—and held his shot. The safety clicked back on his weapon.

It was an execution squad.

An officer with a drawn sword came out first. Behind him two soldiers brought a civilian between them. As they passed through the lighted door Temple held his breath.

The quick glance he had showed him the short, rotund figure of a French peasant—and he might have been Andre Ruen. Undoubtedly he was that man's brother—the spiritual head and leader of the French underground army.

Behind this man a squad of eight

armed riflemen came!

THE officer barked a guttural order, and the procession started down a rear trail lined with trees. Temple had already explored it and had found that it led back to a skeet-shooting course to the rear of a clump of trees.

Now Temple crawled back into the darkness to the point where he had hidden his machine gun, found it, and started trailing the squad of men. When they came to the opening, the officer barked, "*Halten!*"

The firing squad halted, while the two guards beside the prisoner marched him on another fifty feet. One of the men put a blindfold on him, by the simple expedient of slapping a side strip of adhesive tape across his eyes. Germans profiting by the methods of the American gangsters, about whom they were always so scornful. They used more of the tape to fasten his wrists behind his back.

While Temple crouched in the trees at the edge of the clearing, he saw the young officer in charge walk over to the prisoner and converse with him in a voice which Temple could not hear. Then he saw the officer light a cigarette and insert it in the prisoner's mouth.

"Damned decent of him, giving the condemned a last smoke," he thought. "I hate to—"

He cursed. "Hell no, I'm always trying to think of those rats as human beings. He's given Ruen that cigarette apparently as a gesture of sympathy—but really so his executioners will have a light in the dark to shoot at! Those dirty—I can't think of anything more vile to call them than—spawn of Hitler! Boy, that salves my conscience!" He actually caressed the machine gun in his hands.

Now the officer stepped back to the firing squad which stood at attention, like shadows from hell in the darkness,

and the two guards came and joined them.

Ruen puffed at his cigarette, his simple peasant soul probably grateful for this last kindly gesture from a considerate enemy. He stood erect before the firing squad, his shoulders squared.

The tiny pink glow of the cigarette made an excellent target for the marksmen!

The voice of the dim figure of the officer barked. Eight guns came up in unison, and the metallic click of their bolts shoving cartridges home came to Temple's ears. Then the second order, and—

Temple's machine gun burst into life, throwing black lead and orange tracers toward the shadowy squad—and those shadows went down like pins in a bowling alley. Temple was on his feet going forward behind his spitting gun, and he pushed onward the squad until the last man was dead, and Ruen stood alone—his cigarette a tiny pink dot in the blackness.

Temple rushed to the reprieved man, caught his shoulder. "Ruen, you are not dying. I have killed them all. Quickly, now, your brother and your friends are waiting for you at the cheese cave."

He caught the corner of the adhesive tape and ripped it from the man's eyes. The peasant looked about queerly in the darkness, peered unbelievably at Temple in his peasant costume. He could not speak, but the starlight shone on the tears running down his cheeks.

"I am an American sent over to rescue you and return you to your work," Temple explained quickly. "We have much to do—for if we succeed, the day of your liberation is at hand."

"No," the peasant said slowly. "We will never succeed while von Krock is here. That man is a genius, a clever,

cruel genius."

"Part of my task was to capture or kill him," Temple said. "I saw him for a moment—but I failed to kill him. My work is only half done, but I thought it more important to rescue you at that moment than to try to follow von Krock. I can get him later, but I couldn't have saved you later."

Temple ripped the tape off the man's wrists, freeing them. "Now, I have a job before we return to St. Omar. If you will help me—"

"I have only one purpose in life, to drive these *canaille* from our land. Anything I can do—"

"Fine. But if we are to have much chance to get to St. Omar, we had better get out of these clothes. Let's see if any of these German uniforms fit."

Ten minutes later, dressed in *feld-grau* German field uniforms, helmeted and carrying German rifles, they crawled back to the big ammunition warehouse. The big police dog was outside the open front door of the sprawling building, lying on the ground with his paws between his legs, while the solid line of sentries stood at the door entrance.

The dog sniffed the air, got up and started at a trot toward the darkness of the woods where Temple and Ruen lay hidden.

Temple had amputated a hand from one of the dead Germans—and as he had hoped, the animal's keen sense of smell had located the scent of blood and he had come toward it.

Ruen's peasant background stood him in good stead. He talked in a low tone to the animal, and the dog, after whiffing him suspiciously for a moment, decided that he was a friend, and allowed himself to be held by the collar.

TEMPLE had slipped away to where his stolen German squad car was hidden, but he was back in less than

five minutes, bringing his ever-handly canvas bag.

Temple took the two heavy strips of adhesive tape which he had kept after removing them from Ruen's face and wrists, and prepared to return them to the Germans. He used them for a harness.

And with this harness, he attached thermite incendiary bombs to the animal's back and pulled the pins which started the time mechanism which would explode them in ten seconds with a force which would wreck a building, and scatter blazing magnesium in a radius of fifty feet where it would burn at more than two thousand degrees of temperature for ten minutes.

And with his other hand he took his pliers and pinched the tender skin of the dog's flank until it brought blood. The dog bared his fangs, yelped to high heaven, and lit out for the friendliness of his home in the ammunition warehouse.

"Sorry Fritzie," Temple said springing to his feet, "but your life is worth less than fifty million Frenchmen. Run, Ruen!"

They were halfway to the car when the first explosion came, that of the bombs. It rocked the air, and it was certain that there was not a guard left alive closer than the house.

"Keep going!" Temple warned Ruen. "That's just the beginning. That thermite will ignite the ammunition itself pretty quickly. Nobody could stop it if they were alive and there on the scene."

They reached the front of the clubhouse, and Temple saw the staff cars lined up. All the chauffeurs had run inside, or somewhere else, when the explosion shook the grounds. "This way," Temple shouted. "We'll take one of these."

They piled into a car with a two-star flag on the radiator, and Temple

shot it out onto the main road, and was five miles away when—

The earth jumped up under them and the heavens split asunder! A sheet of flame as from a bursting volcano made the night as though it were mid-day with its flaming brilliance. And the bellow of its explosion was as though the roof had blown off hell itself!

A million tons of ammunition, hoarded under von Krock's very nose, and von Krock's Calais headquarters including its powerful radio station the artery of his communications system—all this was just a great hole in the ground.

The explosion had literally blown the flesh off the bones of every living German within a quarter of a mile of the place—and there was not an unshattered windowpane within ten miles of the seacoast town!

But—von Krock had escaped! Temple thought of this and cursed, as he tooted the official car forward toward St. Omar with its siren screeching to clear traffic.

CHAPTER IV

ZERO HOUR

THE ROAD back to St. Omar was jammed with cars—leaving the city. Ahead of them, Temple could see a dozen large fires blazing, the work of Slug and Fatso who were putting on a two-man war against the troops occupying that city. Civilians had had enough of terror for one night, and were escaping as fast as they could.

Ruen knew the back roads, and they turned off the crowded thoroughfare and took the lanes around the town, and brought up in the hillside grove in which

the cheese cave was located.

This hillside was a mass of gigantic boulders from the size of a barrel to the size of a large room. Ruen led Temple through the black forest of woods and stones to a crevice between two rocks. They crawled through the darkness for a distance of a hundred feet—and suddenly came into a lighted cavern with limestone walls. The Ruen cheese caves.

There were twenty or more men in the cave besides Temple's crew. Fatso saw him coming and came over. "How'd you like our fireworks party?"

"Good. What's the news from HQ?"

They went over to a corner where Pete Peroni sat with a pair of headphones on his ears, and a mouthpiece resting on his chest. The sending table was made of boards across two boxes, and back of them was a small gasoline motor and generator. The tower consisted of a lightning rod which ran up through the roof of the cave and up the trunk of a giant elm tree. It was carefully concealed. This was the main contact between enslaved France and the free world.

Pete studied a sheaf of papers, messages he had received in code. "They said if you hadn't accomplished your mission, to return to your base. The operator told me personally that he had heard them discussing it, and that they figured most of us would be dead by now, and that there wasn't much chance of your succeeding."

"Yeah? I suppose that means they won't send the guns. Send this back, and don't even bother to code it. Tell 'Commandop' Ruen is free and is at the head of a group waiting for the guns. They will be at point A within one hour. Tell them that von Krock will be in my hands by sunrise—that the whole German coast command will be in a state of complete confusion by daylight. And tell them that if they ever

expect to invade this coast—this dawn is most favorable hour. And don't code it, I say. I want the Germans to know it. It'll add to their confusion."

"How?"

"They'll never believe it possible that anybody can tell the truth. Thus, they'll try to figure out what it means, never suspecting that we actually mean what we say."

Pete started sending the message, and Temple turned to look for Ruen. The two French farmer brothers were still in each other's arms, and encircled by their friends. They took turns kissing their leader on both cheeks, and they all were weeping unashamed.

"Sorry to intrude," Temple said, "but I've got a job for you men. There will be a hundred thousand machine guns, one round of ammunition for each, and a supply of incendiary and demolition grenades here soon. They will come on a barge and be landed at the mouth of St. Ann inlet, on the coast ten miles north of Calais. Ruen, you will have to get men to bring them in and distribute them."

"*Oui*. We will do it," the leader said. "You tell us what you want, and my friends and I will see that it is accomplished. Something tells me that the hour is approaching."

"It is. Win or lose—the hour is approaching."

The other Frenchmen were all attention.

"This is the situation, gentlemen, based on information you have given us before, and on our plans. Three groups of invasion barges will reach this point above Calais in an hour. They will be side by side, but about a mile apart. A group of Commandos will make a landing a mile south of the inlet, and another a mile north of it. This is merely for diversion. While the coastal defenses rush to attack them, that will leave the inlet unprotected."

"But there is barbed wire along the beach there, M'sou."

"*Oui!*" Temple agreed. "True. But we are prepared for that. The barges which come into the inlet are what we call Higgins landing barges. They are of very shallow draft, and can be pushed right up onto the beach. The front end of them lets down like a runway, and tanks and trucks can run off them onto the shore under their own power."

"Marvelous!"

"**N**OW, the gun barges are loaded like this. Observe! In the front of the barges are four light tanks abreast. Behind each tank is a row of five solid-tired, half-track trucks, each loaded with machine guns and other bombs and shells—twenty truckloads of weapons to each barge. And there are five barges, five hundred tons of machine guns. And recall—German ammunition fits every one of them. Every man who kills a German has a new supply of ammunition waiting in the dead German's belt! And there will be more guns for you when the invasion starts in the morning—not to mention the weapons of dead Germans."

"That is many weapons," Ruen said. "In the hands of our men—yes, our women and children—we can make our wrath felt!"

"Fine. Now, as to your task. As these barges hit the beaches there will be our commandos drawing the Germans' attention away from them. You are waiting with your hundred truck drivers—"

"But the barbed wire, M'sou—"

"I am coming to that. The front runways of the barges flop down—and four processions of trucks, each procession led by a tank, comes ashore. The tanks come forward and tear through the barbed wire as though it were

grass—and the trucks follow behind in the paths they clear!”

“That is good, very good!” Ruen purred.

“These trucks will be turned over to your men, and you will instantly separate and go in a hundred directions—to scatter the arms, and to instruct your friends in the simple use of those guns as you have planned. That’s the idea. Ruen, you *must* get those guns into the hands of your friends! The Germans can never capture that whole hundred trucks scattered through the back roads of the whole coast.”

“You are right, M’sou. Our plans are so carefully laid that we will have those guns distributed one to a family in less than four hours.”

“Good! And I have only one more suggestion. That concerns the signal, and it is simple. The invasion will start at dawn. Half an hour before it starts, no less than a thousand airplanes will fill the skies. When you hear them you will know that the hour has struck. You will each individually set out to create as much hell and confusion as you can. Wherever you are you will shoot every German you see, burn every concentration point of his, destroy his cement pillboxes with hand grenades—and—in short take the war into your own hands. Make it a personal war! Destroy those who have enslaved and robbed and starved you, and murdered your sons and brothers. Men—this is your hour—and may God be with you! Now, get busy. Scram!”

When Andre Ruen had gone and taken his friends with him, Temple turned to the brother, Peter Ruen, who had first met him. “Peter,” he said. “You have your group of demolition volunteers where you can get in touch with them?”

“Oui. I can assemble them in half an hour.”

“Then here’s your job. According

to our maps there are twenty or more paved roads running back inland from the coast north and south of Calais. You will take the demolition bombs we dropped by parachute, find bridges on each of those roads, and destroy them, as well as any railroad running down to the coast. Our purpose, of course, is to keep heavy forces of Germans from reinforcing the coast while we establish a landing.”

He picked up a mouse trap out of one of the cartons of explosives which had been brought into the cave. “Observe!” he said. “A simple mouse trap—but as we in America say, it will kill rats. also. This is how it is done.”

He took a length of common electric wire, composed of two insulated copper wires twisted around each other. He trimmed the insulation from the two wires at one end, bent them back sharply. “Now, we attach one wire to the break-neck spring of the trap, so. And we attach the other wire to the wooden base.”

He set the mousetrap by bringing the spring wire back and holding it back by the delicate trigger. “Now watch. When I spring the trap, the breakneck wire flies over and comes into contact with the other wire, when we have the other ends of this wire attached to a battery, that would complete the circuit.”

“I see,” Peter Ruen beamed. “A delicate trigger to set off a bomb.”

“Righto. Now, we tie a thread to the trigger of the mouse trap, and we run it across the road. We hide our bomb, which contains the battery, under the bridge or railroad trestle we are to demolish. The first car which passes, hits the thread, that jerks the trigger and springs the mouse trap and completes the electric circuit—”

“And, *pouf!* The Germans blow up the road themselves. Bona! Good, M’sou. I understand, and it shall be

done."

"And now one more little trick for the *Fridolins*, and you can get busy! This is for the purpose of giving them the jitters, more than for the material effect—but it is worth the trouble, because it will spread panic and confusion among our enemies!"

HE OPENED another carton, and Peter Ruen looked puzzled as he picked up one of the strange collections of objects and examined it. It was a nickel-plated watch with a hand grenade the size of a large lemon attached to it. He laid it aside and picked up a fountain pen which was also attached by a short length of wire to a grenade.

"This box looks like a pawnshop," he observed. He was noting an odd assortment of objects, which filled a dozen large cartons, such as the fountain pens, watches, gold coins, and even fiber door mats, commonly used for wiping mud from the feet. All these objects had bombs attached to them by short lengths of wire.

"I must admit I am puzzled," the Frenchman said.

"These are to be dropped everywhere in the paths where Germans are likely to walk. Bury the grenade and wire, pull the pin carefully, and leave the object beside the sidewalk. Show me a German—or anybody else for that matter—who would walk past a nice gold fountain pen, or a watch, or a gold coin, without picking it up. And when he does—bang—! Slip up in the dark and put these doormats before doors of homes used by German officers. There are directions for setting the attached bombs printed on the back. They detonate these twenty-pounders, which will demolish the house.

"Here are bombs to attach to the ignition system of parked cars, to fit into bicycle kits—and even to put into the bowls of soup eaten by German offi-

cers in public places. Here's a bomb attached to a common spring clothes pin. Squeeze it into a closed door. When the door is opened it releases the pinched clothes pin and explodes the bomb. I tell you man—distribute thousands of these where they will do the most good and the German officers will be afraid to put on their own pants, for fear they will blow up. More fear—and confusion!"

Ruen said gravely, "The Germans tell us you Americans are crazy, but I have heard one of your own men explain it. 'Crazy like a fox,' he said. I can believe it. And you may be sure that the Germans who live through this war will be afraid to pick up a lost object on the street for a good many years to come. I will have our women making more of these out of every available thing they can find. And they will have all the Germans crazy by morning."

"Good luck to you," Temple said, shaking the man's hand as he left. Then he turned to his own crowd which was squatting around the cave eating Roqueford cheese, and black bread, and drinking red *vin ordinaire* out of stone mugs, as they drew it from barrels lined up along the walls. Temple squatted with the boys and tasted his first food for many long hours.

He stopped in the middle of a bite. "Say, Pete. Have you heard from your brother? I haven't seen him—"

"Yes, sir," the second twin answered. "I forgot to report to you. When you left him, he had a kind of adventure. It seems that when you blew up the tavern and stole a car, two other cars set out in pursuit, but a fourth one was left there empty. Mike thought he would do a little scouting until you got back, so he took the car and drove into St. Omar."

"It's a wonder he wasn't caught."

"He was. That is, he bumped into

a German. This fellow, dressed in French peasant clothes, spots him when he goes into a tavern to have a drink, and gets to talking to him. The fellow had seen him in the German scout car. In the talk it turns out that this guy is a German *gestapo* agent, who thinks Mike is, too, because Mike's in that German car.

"This *Fridolin* is pretty drunk and he's shooting off his mouth. It seems that his job is to protect von Krock's sweetheart, who had a chateau near this gin mill where they're drinking."

Temple dropped his bread and cheese. "Why didn't you tell me this before? Where's he now?" Temple was so excited that he lost all thought of food.

"Why, he's covering the chateau. He bought the guy a bottle of cognac, and walked back with him to the house. When the guy takes up his post again, with the bottle of liquor for company, Mike goes back to his jeep and calls me to ask you what to do. I told him to stick there till I called back."

Temple slapped the boy on the back. "Boy, I hadn't any idea how I was going to deliver old Krockie like I promised, but this gives us a break. That brother of yours isn't dumb at all. Between the two of you, you make a pretty good soldier. Call him and tell him to come here and pick us up."

"Something cooking?" Fatso asked, joining them. "I'm kinda getting restless again."

"We're going to call on a lady, son. So you and Slug watch your manners. Wipe your feet when we go into her house—and don't slap her teeth out unless I tell you to."

He turned to Bronko Wolowski and Bettes the cotton farmer, who were sitting on the floor with a big cheese and gallon jug between them. "You boys had a couple of prisoners to take care of. What happened to the French

tavern keeper and Webber?"

THE two men looked at each other. Bettes said, "Well, Peter Ruen wanted to have a little chat with the man who had sold out his brother to the Germans. He took him outside of the cave."

"Yeah?"

"Well—Duval don't need watching any more."

"And Webber?" Temple looked at Wolowski.

Wolowski stabbed his knife into the big hunk of cheese, looked off across the cave and answered. "I wish you wouldn't ask me that question, Lieutenant. But you can count him out for the duration—and then some."

"I understand, Bronko. I won't ask you."

"Thanks."

Temple took one last look around the cave, then approached the remaining five of his men. They had not taken any part in his movements up to now, but had been directing the delivery of the incendiary equipment which had been dropped by parachute from the second plane which had accompanied their party. Now they had finished getting it all into the caves.

Temple spoke to Sergeant Tex Wofford, who had been in charge. "Here is half a map of the St. Omar area which we took a while ago. Fatso and Slug have worked over the other half of the town. Take your boys and some fireworks and give all these marked spots the once over lightly. This section is foaming already, and a few more firecrackers ought to bust it wide open. Do your stuff, Tex. Remember the Alamo, or whatever you cactus-hoppers say."

Fatso and Slug joined him with an assortment of typical paratrooper playthings. Temple took a last drink of wine. "And now, boys, we'll go and

interview 'Cherchez la femme.'"

"I'll do the searching," Fatso offered.

Slug said scornfully, "That means search *for* the woman, not search the woman. So, keep your hands in your pockets."

CHAPTER V

THE THUNDER OF WAR

MIKE, the twin, picked them up in his stolen jeep, skirted the main streets and parked them a block from a low-roofed chateau sitting in the middle of a block-square terraced lawn in the edge of the better residential section of town.

It was pitch dark, and for the last half hour there had been no air raid siren. The town was quiet, but there was a restless and ominous quiet about it which bespoke the nervous tension and fear behind the blacked-out windows. The German army cars, with their dim blue headlamps scurried back and forth almost as silently as the night itself, the troops huddled in them gripping their guns apprehensively.

"Here's her place," Mike said as they piled out under the blackness of a big maple. "This drunk German guard was a kind of a sap, and he fairly poured out everything he knew, just to prove how important he is. The most important thing he said was that von Krock managed to visit her some time every night, no matter what else he was doing or where he might have business. And—he hasn't been there yet tonight."

"That's fine," Temple said. "I missed him once tonight. Maybe we're getting a real break. Anyway—Listen!"

The distant sound of *alerte* sirens floated in from the West, toward Calais. The men froze under their tree, waiting to see what happened next. Nothing

happened.

"I think the Air Command is sending reconnaissance over to see if the Germans are fed up on false alarms. And it looks like we've done a good job. The Heines are not going to make fools of themselves jumping to their defenses every time an alarm sounds any more."

"That was our main idea," Temple said. "When the real fireworks start they won't know it's the McCoy until they're knee-deep in bombs. Well, let's go check on von Krock's taste in gals. Mike, go give that *gestapo* friend of yours a shave around the neck."

Mike slid out through the darkness and was gone five minutes. He came back wiping the blade of his knife on the leg of his overalls.

Temple went to the front door, tried it softly and found it locked. It was a matter of less than a minute for him to open it soundlessly and let himself into a lighted hall. Off the hall to the right was a living room—and it was occupied.

In the dim light of the exotic room, Temple saw von Krock's girl—in the arms of a young German officer.

"*Pardonne moi*," he said pleasantly. "Sorry to interrupt."

The young German officer stood erect, threw his shoulders back, and glared arrogantly at the intruder in the German private's uniform.

"*Vas iss?*" he barked. "*Swine*."

Temple walked farther into the room with an easy smile on his face. "Colonel Hechsher, I believe? If I remember the picture and caption correctly, you are von Krock's young tactical genius, responsible for most of his brilliant successes. His brains and his right hand, I've heard."

THE handsome young officer glared at the impertinent soldier, still unable to understand the interruption.

Temple continued;

"You must be a trusted friend if the General details you to handle his amorous as well as his military campaigns. I imagine such a charming objective would call for your best tactics. Yes?"

A storm of rage twisted the French woman's face, and her hands were clutching like the claws of a cat, while a storm of French gutter profanity flowed from her lips.

"Take it easy, sister," Temple told her. "I'm not here to check on your faithfulness to von Krock. Your character is indicated by your entertaining the invaders. What I'm here for, sister, is to make a deal with you."

"This is enough of your insanity, man," the Colonel barked. "You will be shot instantly. How did you get through the guard?"

"Just like you did, Colonel. You probably paid them more than von Krock to keep their mouths shut about you double-crossing him. I gave them something far more valuable to let me through."

"What? They would not betray me."

"I gave them freedom from the likes of you by way of the grave, if you understand. Now, if you would like to escape the wrath of the general, I'd be glad to accommodate you in the same manner. Otherwise, I'll accept your surrender as a prisoner of war."

"Who are you?" demanded the young colonel, his handsome face growing red in his rage at this insolence.

"Lieutenant Clay Temple, United States Army."

"Then you are a spy, for you are not in your own uniform."

"You can complain of that later. But right now, are you ready to surrender?"

Hecksher thought and acted with lightning speed. Seeing that Temple had no sidearms within quick grasp, he lunged with outstretched arms, hands

going for Temple's neck.

Caught by surprise, Temple had no time to go for a gun, nor even draw back his fist for a quick blow. The German's hands reached his neck and his iron fingers sank into Temple's throat, cutting off his breath.

But Temple had an alternative, learned in his hard months of training. Before the German had stopped his forward motion, Temple's two hands darted forward and caught the man's coat lapels. With a good grasp on them, Temple fell over backwards, bringing the oncoming German over with him.

As Temple fell over backwards with the German falling on top of him, he raised his feet, caught the German in the pit of the stomach and shoved upward. Lying on his back, he pushed upward with his feet and sent the German somersaulting over his head, breaking the strangle hold.

Colonel Hecksher's body was in the air, head down, and he crashed to the floor, the top of his skull catching his weight as he fell. The blow knocked him unconscious, and just as Fatso appeared, Temple had his hands and feet tied fast.

Temple was on his feet. He crossed the room to where the French woman was standing, her eyes darting fire.

Temple stood and returned the look contemptuously for half a moment, then reached out and shoved her forcibly down onto the chaise lounge.

Temple stood over the angry girl and said, "I told you I'd make a deal with you—a trade."

"I will have nothing to do with you. When my protector comes he will have you killed."

"You had better listen to the terms, sister. I am offering you your life."

A frightened look flashed over the girl's face, and then disappeared. "I have no fear of my life."

"No! That is good, because you are going to be turned over to Andre Ruen and his friends. But, since you have nothing to fear—"

The woman could not hide her fright this time. "No," she cried. "They do not understand. They are cruel peasants—"

TEMPLE had noticed that she had been looking at the clock with almost frantic watchfulness. "When are you expecting von Krock?" he shot at her.

"I am not expecting him."

"Don't lie to me."

"It is true. I am not expecting him. He is a busy man, and I seldom see him."

"In that event, there is no use for me to offer to deal with you. I was going to give you your life if you would help me catch von Krock. But since you won't be able to help—"

The woman was confused. Caught in the dilemma of having to deliver von Krock up, or having to face the neighbors she had turned her back on.

She broke into tears. "You do not understand, and they do not understand my poor heart," she mourned. "How can I help it if I follow where my heart leads me? I am just a poor French girl who—"

"Can it, sister; your love for him didn't interfere with you going for one of his younger officers. If your love for him is worth being turned over to Ruen—"

"But I do not expect him here for several days—"

Slug at this moment brought in a frowsy, sleepy-eyed old woman. Slug was shoving her into the room and grinning at her string of peasant profanity as she balkily came forward. "Here's the maid, boss. She's the only other person in the house."

The sleepy woman looked about her

in bewilderment.

The girl cried out, "Marie! Make these men go away! Call the guard! They are insulting me. I will have them shot when—" she caught herself, bit her lip.

"When von Krock comes you can recommend that," Temple said. Then he turned to the servant. "Marie, you can save this girl's life. We are here to get von Krock when he comes, and we'll wait a year if necessary. And if we don't get help from you, we are going to turn you both over to the French patriots."

"Marie," shrilled the young woman. "Don't you—dare! I'll have your life for this if you speak a word."

Old Marie walked over closer to Temple, and her hand went up slowly and a work-hardened finger touched the safety pin he had transferred to his military blouse. With near-sighted eyes she examined Slug and Fatso, and saw that they also had garments held with safety pins.

Then she opened up the neck of the faded, silken kimono, and Temple saw that she also had a safety pin, fastening the neck of a worn white cotton dress. "You are from Andre Ruen?" she asked slowly.

"Oui!"

The girl on the divan snapped. "Marie. Do as I tell you, you fool. Do you hear? Call the guards!"

Old Marie crossed the room, stood before the girl and put her fists on her broad hips. "You *bartender's scrub-woman*, you," she started. Her voice was low and emphatic at first, but rose rapidly as her speech increased in speed. She cursed the girl with the vehemence which only a French peasant woman can muster. She started on the girl's ancestors and worked down to the present generation of her mother and sisters. She exhausted herself before she turned to Temple.

"I will tell you. Von Krock is due here in half an hour. It is not von Krock this creature loves, it is the luxury he gives her. She has sold her soul—and her people—for the luxury he has given her. Yes, I have been her servant, but only so I could watch von Krock through her and report his actions to my people. Peter Ruen is my brother, and Andre Ruen is my brother. Yes, von Krock will be here in half an hour, and if she will not help you catch him, I will do it for you, and I will take care of her later. I thank God the hour has come when I have to serve such a creature no longer, even for my country."

"Good gal," Fatso laughed. "Give her the works. Nothing like a good cat fight to break the monotony of a world at war."

Slug said, "You'd better make up your mind. I heard a car pull up."

The former bar-girl wilted. "I will do it," she said hastily. "I will do what you say. Please, to save my life, give me a chance. What do you want?"

Temple said, "All right. The invasion hour is at hand, and if you make one crooked move I'm going to turn you over to the soldiers. I merely want you to act as though we were not here until von Krock gets settled down for his visit. He's a smart old bird, and we are not going to have him warned. One peep out of you to him and I'll shoot you dead myself. Understand?"

"Oui!"

"Drag Heckster out, Fatso, and hide in the bedroom."

THEY emptied the room, leaving the girl reclining on her chaise longue while they hid in the bedroom on the other side of the door. Temple got a place where he could see into the room through a crack.

He never afterward could figure out how the girl did it, but some way she

managed to convey a silent message to the German General—and without speaking a word. It was one of the war's major mysteries to Temple, but he saw it enacted.

General von Krock let himself in with his own passkey, and came directly to the living room. Temple saw him and was surprised.

Von Krock was in civilian clothes, formal evening black suit with tails. His snowy white shirt was slashed with a red silk ribbon, on which he wore a large jeweled gold star of the order of *Pour le Merite*. He was an old man with grizzled white hair, but he was massive, and his carriage was erect and vital.

He wore his civilian dress clothes in immaculate taste, his white wing collar and white tie were perfection, and his heavy mustache, which he wore cut in the Imperial style of old Hindenburg, was waxed and stuck upward at the ends in two-inch points. He was the epitome of all the elegance and arrogance of the old German military caste.

He did not stop as he entered, and this added to Temple's later puzzlement. He clicked his heels, bowed stiffly at the waist to the woman, and greeted her formally.

Then he turned and went to a liquor cabinet, opened it, and took out a combination receiver-transmitter set. Temple saw from his place that the interior of the liquor cabinet contained a compact radio set. In his puzzlement, Temple did not instantly interfere, for he had not then realized that the woman had somehow communicated a warning to the General.

And the General had got instantaneous contact, for he said bruskiy,

"Our Intelligence has made the correct interpretation of the night's terrorism. The enemy is preparing for invasion at dawn. You will order Belgium to send the reserves who have

been waiting. Four divisions instantly, others to stand by for further orders. All arms and services go on Battle Plan."

Temple was stunned for a moment. Not knowing how the woman had transmitted her message, he could not realize its significance until he heard the whole of it. But he knew now!

The general had been warned, and without stopping in his walk across a small room he had ordered his complete plan of defensive action to be put into operation! That quickly! That simply!

And now he had turned, bowed again to the girl, braced his shoulders and was walking out again! It was a fantastically unreal performance.

Temple jerked himself out of his stunned surprise, rounded the door, and had his gun in the general's back just as the German started down the hall toward the street door.

"I will have to ask you to wait," Temple said. "Get back into the living room!"

The general turned and looked at him through his monocle, seemed to see right through his disguise. "I presume you are that American lieutenant who has been causing so much trouble. Well?"

Fatso was excited. "What are we gonna do, boss? He's already gave his orders."

"I was thinking," Slug added. "There's only one railroad between here and Belgium that they could use and get here soon enough. And it crosses the Gravelines River over a high bridge. We might beat them to the river—"

"Swell, Slug. But we're going to have to move like lightning. Those troops are a lot closer to that bridge than we are."

"Then what are we waiting for?" Fatso said. "And what are we going

to do with these babies?"

"The gal double-crossed us after all," Temple answered. "Give her to Marie to take to her brothers. We'll take the boys with us."

Slug brought out the trussed body of Hecksher and slashed his bonds and yanked him to his feet. General von Krock turned and looked at him with a cold face. The blue eyes were contemptuous, as he realized what his subordinate's presence meant, but he said not a word. Hecksher tried to return the look, but the ingrained military training made it impossible. His self-respect died a quick, horrible death.

Temple said, "General, would you countermand your order in exchange for your life?"

The general glared at him. "I do not discuss my affairs with swine," he answered arrogantly.

"Suit yourself. Then I'll have to act without consulting you. You will do as you are told—and instantly—or I will put a bullet through the back of your head instead of repeating my order. If you have hopes of living to escape, then you had better humor me. Now, outside."

THEY found Mike outside guarding the premises. "Quick, son. Here's the message you've been waiting to send. Tell Pete to notify Headquarters that both von Krock and Hecksher are prisoners of war. That they managed to give their invasion defense order, but that they are through. Tell 'em that the hour has arrived! Make it snappy, boy!"

"Where are you going?" Mike asked. "I don't want to miss anything."

"We're going to blow up a bridge. Jump in and send your message while we're moving. Fatso, drive like hell to the railroad yards. We've got to find

an engine."

They piled their prisoners into the squad car and Fatso dropped all precautions and he ground it into gear and stepped on the gas. The machine careened down the streets now, with no regard for caution. Theirs was not the only car on the move!

Von Krock's orders had gone out over the air, and now hell broke out in and around St. Omar, and spread up and down the coast like the licking flames of a forest fire. The night became hideous with screaming sirens, and again searchlights cut the night like giant pillars of fire. Troop trucks were on the move, squads and companies of men double-timed on the streets.

Fatso pushed the racing car through the residence district and into the railroad yards.

A switch engine was coming slowly, pushing before it a flat car loaded four feet high with stacks of boxes, and red flags flying. "Live ammunition," Fatso shouted above the clatter of the approaching engine.

"Get it!" Temple ordered, as the car screeched to a stop. "I'll take this side and you take the other, Slug. Mike, bring the prisoners along."

As the car slid to a stop alongside the track, Temple and Slug hit the ground running, on either side of the track. Fatso, coming up behind them, fired one shot and killed the brakeman riding the front end of the loaded flat car.

As the engine approached the crossing, Temple grabbed the hand-hold bars and caught onto the step of the engine cab, while Slug caught it on the other side, and they both mounted the cab from opposite sides at the same time.

The German engineer and fireman tried to put up a fight. In ten seconds their dead bodies were flung out of the engine cab and rolled down the em-

bankment. Temple jumped to the engineer's seat, threw the heavy throttle into neutral, and applied the air brakes. He backed the engine up to pick up Fatso and Mike and the two prisoners.

"Get out in front, Slug, and watch for closed switches," Temple ordered. "Mike, keep a lookout on the fireman's side. And Fatso—you'll like this. Keep the coal pouring to her!"

"She ain't got much steam now," Fatso said. He picked up a shovel and turned to the two prisoners. Von Krock and Hecksher stood in front of the fire-door, under cover of Mike's pistol, ignoring each other.

Fatso looked at Hecksher. "Take off that fancy uniform coat," he snapped. "And grab this shovel. You invented forced labor tactics on the French. Grab it, Friddie, and go to shoveling."

Colonel Hecksher drew himself up proudly. "No, I am no coal shoveler," he said coldly. "I am a German officer, and the Hague treaty—"

Temple shoved the great engine lever forward, released the air brakes. "Hurry that steam up," he shouted.

"Are you going to shovel?" Fatso repeated.

"*Nein!* You cannot make captured officers work, under terms of the Hague Treaty."

Fatso hefted the shovel like a baseball bat and cracked it across the German's face, bashing in his skull. "Then we haven't got room for you here, and we can't leave you behind." He kicked the body out of the moving engine, and turned to the most brilliant general in occupied France. He looked at the immaculate dress suit, and silk top hat.

He offered the General the shovel wordlessly. The General did not even look at it.

"These Heines are sure bull headed, ain't they?" Fatso observed. "I can't

kill him because he's got to work."

He took a knife and slashed a four-foot length off the leather bell cord.

"Now you squareheaded son of a dirty dog, you're going to shovel coal if I have to beat every inch of skin off your slimy hide."

He wrapped one end of the leather around his fists, and using it like a mule whip, he stood in the cramped cab of the speeding engine, and horsewhipped the old general until he had cut his pants and coat to ribbons before he broke the stubbornness of the man.

"You're not going to die, you're going to live and work—just like you've made your French slaves do," Fatso gritted, and gave him some more of the lash.

AND FINALLY the old man could stand no more, and he picked up the shovel. His silk hat was already gone and his coat ripped. He pulled the coat off, and began shoveling coal in his shirt sleeves, while the coal dust settled on his snowy vest.

The engine rattled out of the town and settled down to picking up speed across the rolling farmland. Temple held the throttle and shouted for more speed. Fatso watched the steam gauge and used the lash every time the old general raised up from his coal shoveling.

The wheels rattled over the rails, and the engine swayed from side to side as it picked up speed, and Temple called for more steam as he alternately watched the track and the timepiece on his wrist.

"We'll never make it," he yelled. "More coal, Fat. More coal!"

"I'm killing this guy now," Fatso answered.

"That doesn't matter. He's killed a million the same way. Give me more steam!"

It was dark in the cab except for the

lights on the dials. Every time the general opened the firebox door to throw another shovelful of coal on the fire, the red glow of the blaze played on his sweat-soaked face and clothes. The heat had melted the Imperial points of his mustache, and it now hung wet and dripping on his chin. His white collar was wilted to a dirty rag, and his white vest was soaked through with perspiration from his body, and coated with black coal dust. His patent leather slippers were water-soaked from the leaky waterline which fed the boiler. His pants were in ribbons, and the lower edges of a pair of pink silk shorts shone through the rips. The general was an unhappy slave as he labored to undo his great work of conquest.

The road followed parallel to the coastline, but about twenty miles inland. As the engine roared over hills and down through valleys, swung around curves and clattered over trestles, the whole coast to the left of them was awake. Searchlights pierced the sky, and now above the roar of the engine they could hear the heavy boom of coast artillery as it got into action.

"Ça y est!" Mike shouted. "There it is—the real thing!"

Fatso yelled, "Yep. I bet that channel is black with boats. Hell's broke loose now!"

Hell had broken loose! From the cab of the engine they could see the flashing wings of hordes of airplanes, fighters almost out of sight, ponderous bombers in gigantic vees coming overhead with never a turn to evade the few German fighters who had arisen to meet them. The red flashes of coastal anti-aircraft split the air as they sizzled upward like vicious skyrockets, and burst in flaming brilliance. Bombs whistled downward, and parts of the earth exploded in red flame as they hit and burst.

Here and there in the mad night sky, an airplane caught fire and blazed like the head of a comet, leaving a flaming tail as it crashed to earth to burn to cinders. Giant coastal guns vomited great sheets of flame, and their thunder shook the earth. And still wave after wave of airplanes—until the very heavens were filled with them. While the flack of a thousand anti-aircraft guns sent up curtains of lead to intercept them. Red and green and white starshells floated in lazy and horrible beauty over the scene.

As the switch engine with its lethal car of high explosives roared along its tracks, steel fragments from the bursting aircraft defense shells began raining down on them. Two of the fragments burst through the roof of the engine cab and bounded off the steel floor plates. One of them cut Temple's scalp and his face was saturated with blood. He had to wipe his face with his sleeve to clear his eyes so that he could watch out ahead.

The engine rolled down into a valley, and then started climbing a steep hill. "We ought to be getting close to the river by now," he shouted. "Give me more steam. Fatso, or we won't make this hill. Give me water and coal! More, damnit man, more!"

The German general's drawn face was raised. He looked at the steam gauge, saw that it had already crawled up to where the reading was marked in red. "It will explode," he said huskily.

"Then it will explode! Shovel in more coal!" Droopily, like a galley slave, the general obeyed.

Dawn was breaking over the eastern sky when they reached the top of the hill, and now they could see the terrain. In the gray mists, five miles below and ahead of them, they saw the gaunt, skeletal structure of the bridge over the river. The track they were

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traveling ran downhill to the bridge. And across the river, on the other side of the bridge, the railroad tracks started climbing up another hill on the Belgian side.

"Hey!" Mike shouted, getting down from the fireman's side of the cab and coming over so Temple could hear him. "Did you see that? The first troop train is just coming over that hill. We can't reach the bridge and blow it up before they get to it."

TEMPLE saw the troop train and estimated its distance as about equal to his own from the bridge. He would certainly not have time to slow down, stop at the bridge, and dynamite it before the train reached it.

"We've got to try it another way," he shouted. "Tell Slug to come back here."

Slug had been riding the front end of the ammunition car ahead of the engine. Mike yanked the whistle twice, caught his attention and motioned for him to come back. Slug walked with precarious footing over the boxes of ammunition and reached the engine cab.

"Get down between the engine and that car," Temple ordered, "and see if you can disconnect the coupling without me slowing up. Stay on the engine yourself, though."

Slug crawled over the coal tender, and down to the coupling pins, massive iron claws which were rattling against each other. He reached out and caught the coupling bar handle, hanging precariously over the side from the racing train. He jerked the bar, tried it again and again before he got it loose.

The freight car moved slightly ahead of the engine—free!

Slug crawled back up on the tender and nodded his head, and Temple applied the airbrakes to the engine, slowing it down slightly. Slug watched.

The freight car rolled on down the hill under its own momentum—leaving the engine behind. Slug waved an okay to Temple, and Temple gave the engine more brakes. They brought the engine to a screaming stop in three hundred yards, and they all got out of the cab, driving their prisoner before them, climbed upon the tender, and watched the freight car.

The wild freight car, loaded with live ammunition, careened on down the hill, racing against time to beat the troop train to the bridge. It had to pass along the side of a grove lining the tracks, and this made it probable that the engineer of the troop train would miss seeing it until it was at the bridge itself.

The four commandos and their prisoner stood on the coal tender of the engine and watched the runaway freight car careening down toward the bridge, ignoring flying steel from spent flack, paying no attention to the air above them, not hearing the thunder which set the whole coast bouncing as though an earthquake were rocking it.

There was no word spoken, and yet as his eyes followed the dashing car, he recognized the drama in this final effort, this race between the car and the troop train. The car carried his hopes, and on it depended the lives of thousands of his buddies.

The train, rushing troops to defend the coast from the Allies, carried the hopes, perhaps the destiny, of Germany for a thousand years. The train carried von Krock's Plan of Defense, for over that bridge must pass the troops who would make effective his brilliant generalship.

Von Krock watched the race with a tired, weary look. His body held erect only by force of his iron will.

Now, far down the mountain, the car fairly flew toward the bridge. From his perch on the engine it seemed to

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Temple that the troop train slowed down a little as its engineer must now have seen the inevitable crash. But it was going too fast, with fully opened throttle, and down hill. And it could not stop.

The train and the car met on the bridge, their headon speeds totaling almost two hundred miles an hour!

There was a blinding flash in the gray morning air, louder than any of the big gun voices, brighter in its glare than the sun. And then from the perspective of five miles, they saw the train's engine float gracefully up—even slowly, it seemed—and push its way through the upper structural braces of the bridge, and float gently down to the river, taking half the bridge with it.

The long bridge sagged wearily in the middle, and parted, and its two ends dropped slowly and smoothly into the water.

The rear cars of the train rolled down their inclined end of the rails and disappeared into the boiling water, leaving only some wreckage on the surface.

Slug wiped his nose. "There's something beautiful about a spectacle the size of that, ain't there? Kinda like the poetry of motion or something. Hey. Lookit—"

The general had closed his eyes, and his body, in its dirty rags, was swaying. He opened his eyes again, slowly, and without the sparkle of life in them. His right hand, dirty, bleeding from broken blisters, came up and poised trembling at his temple in a salute.

Then his legs gave way, and he fell and rolled down the pile of coal and lay dead on the steel floorplates of the engine.

Temple looked at him a moment. "Right or wrong, there was something about that old guy. We'll take him back. I guess he deserves a military funeral."

THE distant thunder of guns had become louder now, and the air even thicker with fighting ships, and the whole coast reeled and bled with the onslaught of the Allied Invasion. Back around Calais and St. Omar, a hundred thousand Frenchmen, and their women and children, were armed with simple machine guns, and they fought from their windows and their doors, and from behind the tombstones of their dead, and they cut down those who had enslaved them, while the Allied hordes poured ashore under the barrages of their fighting ships.

The German army didn't know what was the matter. They got orders and had them countermanded. Others got no orders.

Their service of supply failed, and they ran out of ammunition. They did not know what had happened. Where was von Krock? Where was Webber, and where was Hecksher, to tell them what to do? How could they fight like this, with no organization, no directing mind? They could do nothing, they were merely mobs of men, trying to save themselves from destruction. They could only shoot up the last of their shells, and then surrender and save themselves.

The day of reckoning had come!

Mike crawled down off the coal tender and sat down wearily on the fireman's seat. "I'm hungry," he complained. "When do we eat?"

"If you men will take turns shoveling the coal," Temple answered, "I'll drive this engine back to the only cheese cave in France where we can get a bite of cheese and some wine to wash it down with. You boys have earned it!"

He pulled the throttle into reverse, and the switch engine started puffing back toward St. Omar. Behind him, the twisted wreckage of the bridge guaranteed that no German troop train from Belgium would overtake them.



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We want you to carefully examine in your own home the wonderful "American Family" Policy on our 10-day free examination offer. You are under no obligation to keep it. If you do not agree that it is the best insurance for your family then you can send it back at our expense on our written guarantee. You decide for yourself. No agents or collectors will call on you and you have full 10 days to decide. Don't delay. Send the coupon right away.

**Interstate Reserve Life Insurance Co.
 10 E. Pearson St., Chicago, Ill.**

death the rest of the family remain insured. The "American Family" Policy pays for ordinary or natural death, double benefits for automobile accidental death, and triple benefits for travel accidental death.

**10 DAYS' FREE OFFER to the
 readers of Complete War Novels**

The "American Family" Life Insurance Policy is a real and every member of your family is probably the most amazing policy ever written at such a low cost. That is why we want to send you this policy on our 10-day free "read it in your own home" offer. Then you decide for yourself. No agents or collectors to bother you at any time. Any average family can afford the small premium and no family can afford to be without life insurance to cover the bills that come with sudden tragedy. Send coupon today for full information.

Interstate Reserve Life Insurance Co.
 10 E. Pearson St., Dept. 67
 Chicago, Ill.


NO AGENT
 WILL CALL

Please send me 10-day Free Examination offer and full details of "American Family" Group Life Policy without obligation. Send No Money.


Name

Address

City.....State.....



GEE what a build!
Didn't it take a long
time to get those muscles?



SHOWER

**No SIR! - ATLAS
Makes Muscles Grow
Fast!**

Will You Let Me PROVE I Can Make YOU a New Man?

LET ME START SHOWING YOU RESULTS LIKE THESE



**5 inches
of new
Muscle**

"My arms increased
1 1/2", chest 3 1/2",
waist 1 1/2", and
hips 1 1/2".



**What a
difference!**

"My arms
put 3 1/2"
on chest
(normal) and
2 1/2" expanded."
-W. C. N. J.



**Here's what ATLAS
did for ME!**

John Jacobs
BEFORE

John Jacobs
AFTER



**For quick results
I recommend
CHARLES
ATLAS**

"An amazing snapshot
showing wonderful prop-
riety." -W. C. N. J.



**GAINED
29
POUNDS**

"When I started
weighed only
141. Now 170."
-T. K. N. Y.

CHARLES ATLAS

Awarded the title of
"The World's
Most Perfectly
Developed Man"
in international
contest—in par-
ticipation with ALL
men who would
consent to appear
against him.

This is a recent
photo of Charles
Atlas showing
how he looks to-
day. This is not a
studio picture but
an actual un-
touched snap-
shot.

Here's What Only 15 Minutes a Day Can Do For You

I DON'T care how old or young you are, or how ashamed of your present physical condition you may be. If you can simply raise your arm and flex it I can add **SOLID MUSCLE** to your biceps—yes, on each arm—in double-quick time! Only 15 minutes a day—right in your own house—is all the time I ask of you! And there's no cost if I fail.

I can broaden your shoulders, strengthen your back, develop your whole muscular system **INSIDE** and **OUTSIDE**. I can add inches to your chest, give you a vice-like grip, make those legs of yours lithe and powerful. I can about new strength into your old backbone, exercise those inner organs, help you cram your body so full of pep, vigor and red-blooded vitality that you won't feel there's even "standing room" left for weakness and that lazy feeling! Before I get through with you I'll have your whole frame "measured" to a beautiful suit of muscles!

What's My Secret?

"Dynamic Tension." That's the ticket! The identical natural method that I myself developed to change my body from the scrawny, skinny-chested weakling I was at 17 to my present super-man physical. Thousands of other fellows are becoming marvelous physical specimens — my way. I give you no gadgets or contraptions to fool with when you have learned to build

your strength through "Dynamic Tension." you can laugh at artificial muscle-builders. You simply utilize the **DORMANT** muscle-power in your own God-given body—watch it multiply double-quick into solid **LIVE MUSCLE**.

My method — "Dynamic Tension" — will turn the trick for you. No theory — every exercise is practical. And, man, so easy! Spend only 15 minutes a day in your own home. From the very start you'll be using my method of "Dynamic Tension" almost unconsciously every minute of the day — walking, bending over, etc. — to **BUILD MUSCLE AND VITALITY**.

FREE BOOK "Everlasting Health and Strength"

In it I talk to you in straight-talk — the shoulder language. Packed with inspirational pictures of myself and pupils — fellows who became **NEW MEN** in strength, my way. Let me show you what I helped THEM do. See what I can do for YOU! For a real thrill, send for this book today. **AT ONCE, CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 145-28, 115 East 23rd St., New York, N. Y.**

**CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 145-28
115 E. 23rd Street, New York, N. Y.**
I want the good that your system of "Dynamic Tension" will help make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscular development. Send me your free book, "Everlasting Health and Strength."

Name (Please print or write plainly)

Address

CITY State



